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J. Thomson

The Riverside Literature Series

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GARETH AND LYNETTE  
LANCELOT AND ELAINE  
THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

BY

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY SKETCH AND  
EXPLANATORY NOTES



HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY

Boston : 4 Park Street ; New York : 85 Fifth Avenue

Chicago : 378-388 Wabash Avenue

The Riverside Press, Cambridge



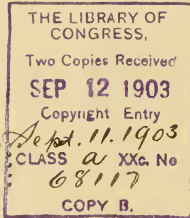
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*The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.*  
Electrotyped and Printed by H. O. Ho



that euer I herd speke of / I haue aspyed / thy kynge met nes  
uer yet with worshipful man / but telle hym / I wyll haue his  
rede without he doo me homage / thenne the messenger departed  
¶ Now is there ony here said Arthur that knoweth kyng Ry  
ons / thenne answered a knyght that hyght Naram / Syr I kno  
we the kyng wel / he is a passyng good man of his body / as  
felwe ben luyunge / and a passyng proude man / and I doubt  
ye not / he wyll make barre on yow with a myghty puyssa  
unce / wel said Arthur I shall ordeyne for hym in short tyme

¶ Capitulum xxviii

**T**henne kyng arthur lette sende for al the childre born on  
may day begote of lordes & born of ladyes / for Merlyn  
told kyng Arthur that he that shold destroye hym / shold be  
borne in may day / wherfor he sent for hem all vpon payn of deth  
and so ther were founde many lordes sones / and all were sente  
vnto the kyng / and soo was Mordred sente by kyng Lotts  
wyf / and all were put in a ship to the see / and some were iiii  
yeres old and some lasse / And so by fortune the shyp drofe  
vnto a castel and was al to ryuen and destroyed the most part  
sauf that Mordred was ast vpon and a good man fonde hym /  
and nourysshed hym tyl he was xiiii yere olde / & thenne he  
brought hym to the Court / as it rehereth afterward to ward  
the ende of the deth of Arthur / So many lordes and barons of  
this reame were displeasyd / for her children were so lost / and  
many put the wyte on Merlyn more than on Arthur / so what  
for drede and for loue they helde their peas / But whanne the  
messenger came to kyng Ryons / thenne was he woodde oute of  
mesure and purueyed hym for a grete hoost as it rehercyth af  
ter in the booke of Balyn le saucage that foloweth next after /  
how by aduenture Balyn gat the sberdy

¶ Explicit liber primus

¶ Incipit liber secundus

**A**fter the deth of Othependragon reigned Ar  
thur his sone / the which had grete werre in his  
dayes for to gete al Englonde in to his hand /  
For there were many kynges within the realme  
of Englonde and in Walys / Scotlande and  
Cornelbaille / Soo it befalle on a tyme / whanne kyng Arthur



## INTRODUCTORY SKETCH.

WE are told that Tennyson made his first acquaintance with the stories of King Arthur in Sir Thomas Malory's "Morte Darthur," when "little more than boy." It is certain that his interest in the tales was shown forth early in his poetical work, for in the volume which he published in 1832, when only twenty-three years old, "The Lady of Shalott" had an important place, and it is easy to read not between but in its lines a prophecy of "Lancelot and Elaine." Ten years later, in 1842, appeared Tennyson's next important work, the "Poems," in two volumes; and these contained, beside the short pieces, "Sir Galahad" and "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere," the "Morte d'Arthur," which, changed in its original introduction and conclusion, eventually became "The Passing of Arthur," the last of the "Idylls of the King." Any one can read for himself the setting which inclosed the poem on its first appearance. To the reader, remembering that the Idylls grew in the end to contain twelve books, there is a special interest in a few of the lines about the imaginary epic of which the "Morte d'Arthur" professed to be but a part. They show clearly that the possibility of an epic of King Arthur, "some twelve books," was already in the poet's mind. "Faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth," he calls the books he professes to have burned;

"but pick'd the eleventh from this hearth  
And have it : keep a thing, its use will come."

As a mere foreshadowing, it had its use; more definitely it must have helped to prepare the way for the first instalment of the "Idylls of the King," published in 1859, and containing "Enid," "Vivien," "Elaine," and "Guinevere." Ten thousand copies of this volume sold within six weeks. In 1869, four more Idylls were brought to light in a volume called "The Holy Grail and Other Poems." These four were "The Coming of Arthur," "The Holy Grail," "Pelleas and Ettarre," and "The Passing of Arthur," which, as we have seen, was none other than the "Morte d'Arthur" of nearly thirty years before. In 1872 came "The Last Tournament" and "Gareth and Lynette." "Balin and Balan" was the last to appear, in "Tiresias and Other Poems," published in 1885. Thus, from the writing of the first of the Arthurian poems, "The Lady of Shalott," to the last, a period of more than fifty years, Tennyson's mind could never have been long without thought of the general theme which runs through the Idylls. In 1888 he gave them the titles and the order of arrangement under which they now are grouped. Dr. Henry van Dyke has well written: "That a great poet should be engaged with his largest theme for more than half a century; that he should touch it first with a lyric; then with an epical fragment and three more lyrics; then with a poem which is suppressed as soon as it is written;<sup>1</sup> then with four romantic idylls, followed, ten years later, by four others, and two years later by two others, and thirteen years later by yet another idyll, which is to be placed not before or after the rest, but in the very centre of the cycle; that he

<sup>1</sup> *Enid and Nimue*, which has not been mentioned in our brief survey of the Idylls as they now stand.

should begin with the end, and continue with the beginning, and end with the middle of the story, and produce at last a poem which certainly has more epical grandeur and completeness than anything that has been made in English since Milton died, is a thing so marvellous that no man would credit it save at the sword's point of fact. And yet this is the exact record of Tennyson's dealing with the Arthurian legend."

It were aside from our present purpose, having shown how the Idylls came into existence, to enlarge upon their significance and their beauties. Each one of those contained in this little book speaks for itself, and when the reader comes to enjoy the entire series in its order, he will feel the unity and power of the whole, perhaps all the more strongly for having tasted here of beginning, middle, and end. It will be no far search for him to find critics full of explanations, many of them excellent, of the spiritual and poetic value of the work, not only in detail but in its large plan. No interpretation should proceed far without sending one back to Tennyson's own description of the Idylls, in the Epilogue "To the Queen," as

"this old imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul."

The remark which he is said to have made to a friend should also be recalled: "By King Arthur I always meant the soul, and by the Round Table the passions and capacities of a man." Instead of looking closely into these matters, however, let us concern ourselves with the source from which Tennyson, directly or by suggestion, drew nearly all the themes with which the Idylls deal. To turn from the pages of a familiar book to others closely related to it has in it something

of the charm of meeting a stranger and finding that you and he have dear friends in common. The analogy must not be pressed too closely; yet as the new friend and the old both seem nearer for the unexpected bond, so, we believe, both Tennyson and Sir Thomas Malory will be worth the more to us, each because of the other.

Who, then, was this Sir Thomas Malory, and what is his book, the "Morte Darthur," which meant so much to Tennyson? Almost nothing is known of Malory himself. At the end of his work he wrote: "This book was ended the ninth year of the reign of king Edward the Fourth by Sir Thomas Maleore, Knight, as Jesu help him for his great might, as he is the servant of Jesu both day and night." From these words the inference has been drawn that, besides being a knight, he was also a priest; but this, like any other surmise, may or may not be true. That William Caxton, the first English printer, finished printing the book in the abbey of Westminster in 1485, about fifteen years after Malory finished writing it, appears to be a certainty. Caxton in his Preface to the book declares that, after he had printed the life of Godfrey of Boulogne, "many divers and noble gentlemen of this realm of England came and demanded me many and oftentimes wherefore that I have not do made and imprint the noble history of the Saint Greal, and of the most renowned Christian king, first and chief of the three best Christian, and worthy, king Arthur, which ought most to be remembered amongst us Englishmen tofore all other Christian kings." Many such histories, he says, existed in foreign tongues, notably Welsh and French, and when the version which "Sir Thomas Malorye did take out



of certain books of French and reduced it into English," came to Caxton's hands, it was most gladly "set down in print." Between 1485 and 1634, five or six more editions of the book were printed, and from 1634 to 1816 none. A few others have appeared from time to time in our century, the most serviceable for general use being the Globe Edition volume (Macmillan) prepared by Sir Edward Strachey.

Of the King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table whose history the book tells, practically nothing of historic certainty can be said. Scholars are divided in their opinions concerning the very existence of the monarch and his court. There are those, however, who maintain firmly that in the days when history was left to shift for itself, without the aid of writers, such a king did flourish. But whether he lived in the sixth century, or some other, or not at all, whether his Camelot was Winchester, as Malory tells, or Cadbury in Somersetshire, or a place as difficult to point out on a map as Shakespeare's Bohemian sea-coast, it is certain that King Arthur and his Knights did live in the popular imagination of the Middle Ages. History and tradition were kept alive much as the stories which Homer told are supposed to have been perpetuated. Bards and minstrels, in France *trouvères*, went from court to court, from castle to castle, singing their songs of gallantry and valor. No stories had more of the elements of appeal to an audience of feudal times, or gave the teller a better opportunity to let his imagination play about his themes than those of King Arthur. Of mysterious birth and death, the founder of a noble order in which the sword and the cross held almost equal value, the victim of a false wife and friend, withal the pattern in him-



self of every knightly virtue, this was a hero, as his followers were a fellowship, to stir every fibre of response in the hearts of the men and women who listened to their history. The listeners were not confined to England. Indeed, Brittany seems to have been the country in which the Arthurian stories first thrived. Throughout France they became perhaps even more popular than in England. In Italy and Sicily, even, the tales were well known. Each country, taught by the troubadours, never loath to use the touchstone of flattery, had a King Arthur of its own. That he is not even yet forgotten as a dead man out of mind, an anecdote which Renan told of Tennyson may show. The poet had spent a night at an inn in a village of Brittany, and in the morning asked his landlady for her bill. "You are the man," she said, "who has sung our King Arthur, and I cannot charge you anything." Such a survival of reverence for a popular hero speaks more than many pages for the power his story has exerted. It is not too much to say that the many mediæval romances dealing with Arthur and his knights, and known to scholars to-day through ancient manuscripts, were so popular as practically to have provided the world for several centuries with its code of chivalry.

In Malory's day the Middle Ages were drawing near their end. But it is no strange thing that he should have known the romances of which it was written "in Welsh be many, and also in French, and some in English." His book shows that his material was drawn most largely from the great French romances of Merlin, Lancelot, Tristram, the Quest du St. Graal, and the Mort Artus. There was in truth every element of fitness in the circumstance that an

English knight, before the days of chivalry had quite passed away, should sum up for the English people in their own tongue the stories of the English hero embodying the truest ideals of knighthood.

If the good knight, however, had been a mere translator and copyist, his book could never have lived in itself and in its influence as it has done. It was his work to bring unity and order out of what was the chaos of his predecessors; to give life to the characters; to create real men and women, of traits, passions, and individualities as strong and distinct as those of the men and women we meet day by day; in a word, to do what only a creative artist, whether he knows himself to be one or not, can do. The result is that the student who would learn something of the real lives of the knights and ladies of the days of chivalry must turn to his pages; and the man or boy whose blood is stirred by tales of noble adventure in tourney and battle, of violence and tenderness in love and war, of loyal friendship and unswerving devotion to lady and king, has but to open the book of Sir Thomas Malory, and find what he has sought.

Since the book is what it is, there need be little wonder that such a mind and nature as Tennyson's felt its spell. It would be interesting to study the *Idylls* and the fifteenth century prose work side by side, and see just what the poet of our own age owed to the story-teller four hundred years before him. It would be found that in some of the poems many of the incidents were purely the fruit of Tennyson's imagination. Having taken his general theme from Malory, he was quite capable of enriching the story itself as abundantly as the manner of its telling. In the thought and philosophy of the poems there is indeed,

as a rule, more of the nineteenth century than of the Middle Ages; nor should we complain of this practice of a modern poet telling an old tale for modern readers. Again, especially in two of the poems contained in this selection, Tennyson has adopted the incidents of Malory's narrative almost without change. It would well repay the interested reader to turn to the eighteenth book of Malory's "Morte Darthur," and read in the chapters from viii. to xx. the pitiful tale of Lancelot and Elaine as the old chronicler told it; the beauty of the story different from the beauty of the poet's work, yet in its way no less winning, the likenesses and variances between the two versions of the tale, the value of the passage as a specimen of the sturdy old English which Malory wrote, all would be felt and prized. It is a long tale in Malory, and we can but refer the reader to it. In shorter measure he tells the story from which Tennyson made most of "The Passing of Arthur," and this passage, for a suggestion of the purpose which the reading of Malory would serve, we venture to transcribe:—

"Therefore, said Arthur [to Bedivere after the battle of which they were the only survivors], take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there, I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again, and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and haft were all of precious stones, and then he said to himself, If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And as soon as he might he came again unto the king, and said he had

been at the water, and had thrown the sword into the water. What sawest thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king; therefore go thou lightly again, and do my command as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword; and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan. Ah traitor, untrue, said king Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have wend that thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead. Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side, and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might, and there came an arm and an hand above the water, and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank, hove a little barge, with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw king Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king: and so he did softly.

And there received him three queens with great mourning, and so they set him down, and in one of their laps king Arthur laid his head, and then that queen said, Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught over much cold. And so then they rowed from the land; and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried, Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me now ye go from me, and leave me here alone among mine enemies. Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in. For I will unto the vale of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and the ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest."

The more curious reader may compare this passage bit by bit, if he will, with the last poem of the present volume. The less exact may be content with testing the truth of our remark about related books and common friends. May we end this sketch with yet another quotation? Though taken from Caxton's Preface to the "*Morte Darthur*," the serious word it speaks to his readers may stand, linking again the old and the new, as well before Tennyson's book as Sir Thomas Malory's:—

"Wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalry. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renommée. And for to pass the time this book shall be pleasant to read in, but for to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained therein, ye be at your liberty."

## GARETH AND LYNETTE.

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,  
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring  
Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted pine  
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.  
5 "How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight  
Or evil king before my lance, if lance  
Were mine to use — O senseless cataract,  
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy —  
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows  
10 And mine is living blood: thou dost His will,  
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,  
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall  
Linger with vacillating obedience,  
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to —  
15 Since the good mother holds me still a child!  
Good mother is bad mother unto me!  
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.

**Gareth and Lynette**, though one of the last Idylls to be written, follows "The Coming of Arthur," and recounts one of the first adventures of the Table Round. In it we find Arthur's court full of the gayety and joyousness of its early prime, before treachery and sin introduced the tragic forces which brought its dissolution. For the story in its primitive form, see Malory, Book VII. Gareth is there called Beaumains.

1. **Lot** was the aged king of Orkney; **Bellicent**, his queen, was half-sister to Arthur.

3. **Spate**, the flooded river.



Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force  
 To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,  
 20 Until she let me fly discased to sweep  
 In ever-highering eagle-circles up  
 To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop  
 Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,  
 A knight of Arthur, working out his will,  
 25 To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came  
 With Modred hither in the summer-time,  
 Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.  
 Modred for want of worthier was the judge.  
 Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,  
 30 'Thou hast half prevail'd against me,' said so —  
     he —  
 Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,  
 For he is always sullen : what care I ? "

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair  
 Ask'd, " Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,  
 35 Sweet mother, do ye love the child ? " She laugh'd,  
 " Thou art but a wild-goose to question it."  
 " Then, mother, an ye love the child," he said,  
 " Being a goose and rather tame than wild,  
 Hear the child's story." " Yea, my well-beloved,  
 40 An 't were but of the goose and golden eggs."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes :  
 " Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine  
 Was finer gold than any goose can lay ;  
 For this an eagle, a royal eagle, laid  
 45 Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm

18. Heaven yield her for it, *i. e.*, reward her.

26. Modred, the chief traitor of the Idylls.



As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.  
 And there was ever haunting round the palm  
 A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw  
 The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought,  
 50 ' An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,  
 Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.'  
 But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,  
 One that had loved him from his childhood caught  
 And stay'd him, ' Climb not lest thou break thy neck,  
 55 I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy,  
 Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,  
 But brake his very heart in pining for it,  
 And past away."

To whom the mother said,  
 " True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,  
 60 And handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes :  
 " Gold? said I gold? — ay then, why he, or she,  
 Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world  
 Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been  
 65 Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel  
 Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,  
 And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,  
 And all the little fowl were flurried at it,  
 And there were cries and clashings in the nest,  
 70 That sent him from his senses : let me go."

46. **Book of Hours**, an illuminated manuscript, with prayers for the hours of the day.

66. **Excalibur**, Arthur's sword. " The name of it, said the lady, is Excalibur, that is as much to say as cut-steel." (Malory.) The hero's sword was always given a name, like a person, for a spirit of battle was fabled to dwell in it.

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said :  
 " Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness ?  
 Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth  
 Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out !  
 75 For ever since when traitor to the King  
 He fought against him in the barons' war,  
 And Arthur gave him back his territory,  
 His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there  
 A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,  
 80 No more ; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.  
 And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,  
 Albeit neither loved with that full love  
 I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love.  
 Stay therefore thou ; red berries charm the bird,  
 85 And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,  
 Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang  
 Of wrench'd or broken limb — an often chance  
 In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,  
 Frights to my heart ; but stay : follow the deer  
 90 By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns ;  
 So make thy manhood mightier day by day ;  
 Sweet is the chase : and I will seek thee out  
 Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace  
 Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,  
 95 Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness  
 I know not thee, myself, nor anything.  
 Stay, my best son ! ye are yet more boy than  
 man."

Then Gareth : " An ye hold me yet for child,  
 Hear yet once more the story of the child.  
 100 For, mother, there was once a king, like ours.  
 The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,

Ask'd for a bride ; and thereupon the king  
 Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —  
 But to be won by force — and many men  
 105 Desired her ; one, good lack, no man desired.  
 And these were the conditions of the king :  
 That save he won the first by force, he needs  
 Must wed that other, whom no man desired,  
 A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile  
 110 That evermore she long'd to hide herself,  
 Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —  
 Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.  
 And one — they call'd her Fame ; and one — O mo-  
 ther,  
 How can ye keep me tether'd to you ? — Shame.  
 115 Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.  
 Follow the deer ? follow the Christ, the King,  
 Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the  
 King —  
 Else, wherefore born ? ”

To whom the mother said :

“ Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,  
 120 Or will not deem him, wholly proven King —  
 Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King  
 When I was frequent with him in my youth,  
 And heard him kingly speak, and doubted him  
 No more than he, himself ; but felt him mine,  
 125 Of closest kin to me : yet — wilt thou leave  
 Thine easeful bidding here, and risk thine all,  
 Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King ?

103. This line is as above in all the texts. It would seem more natural as well as more poetical for it to read: “ One was fair, strong-armed.”

Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth  
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

130 And Gareth answer'd quickly : " Not an hour,  
So that ye yield me — I will walk thro' fire,  
Mother, to gain it — your full leave to go.  
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome  
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd  
135 The idolaters, and made the people free ?  
Who should be king save him who makes us free ?"

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain  
To break him from the intent to which he grew,  
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,  
140 She answer'd craftily : " Will ye walk thro' fire ?  
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.  
Ay, go then, an ye must : only one proof,  
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,  
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,  
145 Thy mother, — I demand."

And Gareth cried :  
" A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.  
Nay — quick ! the proof to prove me to the quick !"

But slowly spake the mother looking at him :  
" Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,  
150 And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks  
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,  
And those that hand the dish across the bar.

128. Arthur's parentage, as we read in "The Coming of Arthur," and in the old stories, was shrouded in mystery. Many held that he was the son of Uther Pendragon, who was united by enchantment with Ygerne, the wife of Gorlois.

Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.  
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."

155 For so the Queen believed that when her son  
Beheld his only way to glory lead  
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,  
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud  
To pass thereby ; so should he rest with her,  
160 Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied :  
" The thrall in person may be free in soul,  
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,  
And, since thou art my mother, must obey.  
165 I therefore yield me freely to thy will ;  
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself  
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves ;  
Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye  
170 Full of the wistful fear that he would go,  
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,  
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour  
When, waken'd by the wind which with full voice  
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,  
175 He rose, and out of slumber calling two  
That still had tended on him from his birth,  
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.  
Southward they set their faces. The birds made  
180 Melody on branch and melody in mid air.  
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,

And the live green had kindled into flowers,  
For it was past the time of Easter-day.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain  
185 That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,  
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn  
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,  
That rose between the forest and the field.  
At times the summit of the high city flash'd ;  
190 At times the spires and turrets half-way down  
Prick'd thro' the mist ; at times the great gate shone  
Only, that open'd on the field below :  
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,  
195 One crying, " Let us go no further, lord :  
Here is a city of enchanters, built  
By fairy kings." The second echo'd him,  
" Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home  
To northward, that this king is not the King,  
200 But only changeling out of Fairyland,  
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery  
And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,  
" Lord, there is no such city anywhere,  
But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them

205 With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow

185. **Camelot**, a legendary city which men have attempted to identify with various ancient towns in Wales and the west of England. Tennyson here expressly makes it an ideal city of the imagination.

202. **Glamour**, enchantment; curiously enough this word was originally a corrupt form of "grammar." See the Dictionaries.



In his own blood, his princedom, youth, and hopes,  
 To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea ;  
 So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.  
 And there was no gate like it under heaven.

210 For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined  
 And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,  
 The Lady of the Lake stood : all her dress  
 Wept from her sides as water flowing away ;  
 But like the cross her great and goodly arms

215 Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld :  
 And drops of water fell from either hand ;  
 And down from one a sword was hung, from one  
 A censer, either worn with wind and storm ;  
 And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish ;

220 And in the space to left of her, and right,  
 Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,  
 New things and old co-twisted, as if Time  
 Were nothing, so inveterately that men  
 Were giddy gazing there ; and over all

225 High on the top were those three queens, the friends  
 Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space  
 Stared at the figures that at last it seem'd  
 The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings

230 Began to move, seethe, twine, and curl : they call'd  
 To Gareth, " Lord, the gateway is alive."

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes  
 So long that even to him they seem'd to move.  
 Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.

212. **The Lady of the Lake**, a mystical personage, who was a kind of supernatural guardian of Arthur. See "The Coming of Arthur," and "The Passing of Arthur."



235 Back from the gate started the three, to whom  
 From out thereunder came an ancient man,  
 Long-bearded, saying, "Who be ye, my sons?"

Then Gareth: "We be tillers of the soil,  
 Who leaving share in furrow come to see  
 240 The glories of our King: but these, my men, —  
 Your city moved so weirdly in the mist —  
 Doubt if the King be king at all, or come  
 From Fairyland; and whether this be built  
 By magic, and by fairy kings and queens;  
 245 Or whether there be any city at all,  
 Or all a vision: and this music now  
 Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the  
 truth."

Then that old Seer made answer, playing on him  
 And saying: "Son, I have seen the good ship sail  
 250 Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,  
 And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:  
 And here is truth; but an it please thee not,  
 Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.  
 For truly, as thou sayest, a fairy king  
 255 And fairy queens have built the city, son;  
 They came from out a sacred mountain cleft  
 Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,  
 And built it to the music of their harps.  
 And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,  
 260 For there is nothing in it as it seems  
 Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold  
 The King a shadow, and the city real:  
 Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass  
 Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become

265 A thrall to his enchantments, for the King  
 Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame  
 A man should not be bound by, yet the which  
 No man can keep ; but, so thou dread to swear,  
 Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide  
 270 Without, among the cattle of the field.  
 For an ye heard a music, like enow  
 They are building still, seeing the city is built  
 To music, therefore never built at all,  
 And therefore built for ever.”

Gareth spake

275 Anger'd : “ Old master, reverence thine own beard  
 That looks as white as utter truth, and seems  
 Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall !  
 Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been  
 To thee fair-spoken ? ”

But the Seer replied :

280 “ Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards :  
 ‘ Confusion, and illusion, and relation,  
 Elusion, and occasion, and evasion ? ’  
 I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,  
 And all that see thee, for thou art not who  
 285 Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.  
 And now thou goest up to mock the King,  
 Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie.”

Unmockingly the mocker ending here  
 Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain ;

273, 274. The myth of a city built to music is an old one : so Amphion raised the walls of Thebes to the music of his lyre.

280. Like the Grecian oracles the ancient Celtic seers cast their enigmatic prophecies in metrical form.

290 Whom Gareth looking after said ; “ My men,  
 Our one white lie sits like a little ghost  
 Here on the threshold of our enterprise.  
 Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I :  
 Well, we will make amends.”

With all good cheer

295 He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain  
 Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces  
 And stately, rich in emblem and the work  
 Of ancient kings who did their days in stone ;  
 Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,  
 300 Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere,  
 At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak  
 And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.  
 And ever and anon a knight would pass  
 Outward, or inward to the hall : his arms  
 305 Clash'd ; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.  
 And out of bower and casement shyly glanced  
 Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love ;  
 And all about a healthful people stept  
 As in the presence of a gracious king.

310 Then into hall Gareth ascending heard  
 A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld  
 Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall  
 The splendor of the presence of the King  
 Throned, and delivering doom—and look'd no  
 more —

315 But felt his young heart hammering in his ears  
 And thought, “ For this half-shadow of a lie  
 The truthful King will doom me when I speak.”  
 Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find

Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one  
320 Nor other, but in all the listening eyes  
Of those tall knights that ranged about the throne  
Clear honor shining like the dewy star  
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure  
Affection, and the light of victory,  
325 And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King :  
“ A boon, Sir King ? Thy father, Uther, reft  
From my dead lord a field with violence ;  
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,  
330 Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,  
We yielded not ; and then he reft us of it  
Perforce and left us neither gold nor field.”

Said Arthur, “ Whether would ye ? gold or field ? ”  
To whom the woman weeping, “ Nay, my lord,  
335 The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.”

And Arthur : “ Have thy pleasant field again,  
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,  
According to the years. No boon is here,  
But justice, so thy say be proven true.  
340 Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did  
Would shape himself a right ! ”

And while she past,  
Came yet another widow crying to him :  
“ A boon, Sir King ! Thine enemy, King, am I.  
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,  
345 A knight of Uther in the barons' war,  
When Lot and many another rose and fought

Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.  
 I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.  
 Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son  
 350 Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead,  
 And standeth seized of that inheritance  
 Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.  
 So, tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,  
 Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,  
 355 Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son."

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,  
 "A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.  
 Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,  
 360 "A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none,  
 This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall—  
 None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag."

But Arthur: "We sit King, to help the wrong'd  
 Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.  
 365 Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!  
 The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames;  
 Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,  
 And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence—  
 Lest that rough humor of the kings of old  
 370 Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,  
 Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,"

359. **Sir Kay**, Arthur's steward, the butt of the court wit, and the Thersites of the Arthurian story.

367. **Aurelius Emrys**, a mythical king of Britain. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's "*Historia Regum Britanniae*," he preceded Uther Pendragon.

But bring him here, that I may judge the right,  
 According to the justice of the King :  
 Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King  
 375 Who lived and died for men, the man shall die."

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,  
 A name of evil savor in the land,  
 The Cornish king. In either hand he bore  
 What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines  
 380 A field of charlock in the sudden sun  
 Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,  
 Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,  
 Delivering that his lord, the vassal king,  
 Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot ;  
 385 For having heard that Arthur of his grace  
 Had made his goodly cousin Tristram knight,  
 And, for himself was of the greater state,  
 Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord  
 Would yield him this large honor all the more ;  
 390 So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,  
 In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend  
 In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.  
 An oak-tree smoulder'd there. "The goodly knight !  
 395 What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?"  
 For, midway down the side of that long hall,  
 A stately pile, — whereof along the front,  
 Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,  
 There ran a treble range of stony shields, —  
 400 Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth.  
 And under every shield a knight was named.  
 For this was Arthur's custom in his hall :



When some good knight had done one noble deed,  
 His arms were carven only ; but if twain,  
 405 His arms were blazon'd also ; but if none,  
 The shield was blank and bare, without a sign  
 Saving the name beneath : and Gareth saw  
 The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,  
 And Modred's blank as death ; and Arthur cried  
 410 To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

“ More like are we to reave him of his crown  
 Than make him knight because men call him king.  
 The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands  
 From war among themselves, but left them kings ;  
 415 Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,  
 Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd  
 Among us, and they sit within our hall. .  
 But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,  
 As Mark would sully the low state of churl ;  
 420 And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,  
 Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,  
 Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,  
 Silenced for ever — craven — a man of plots,  
 Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —  
 425 No fault of thine : let Kay the seneschal  
 Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —  
 Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen ! ”

And many another suppliant crying came  
 With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,  
 430 And evermore a knight would ride away.

422. In mediæval times lead was used in making coffins. In our older poetry “ to be lapped in lead,” regularly means to be buried.



Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily  
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,  
Approach'd between them toward the King, and  
ask'd,

“ A boon, Sir King,” — his voice was all ashamed, —  
435 “ For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn  
I seem — leaning on these ? grant me to serve  
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves  
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.  
Hereafter I will fight.”

To him the King :

440 “ A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon !  
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,  
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine.”

He rose and past ; then Kay, a man of mien  
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself

445 Root-bitten by white lichen :

“ Lo ye now !

This fellow hath broken from some abbey, where,  
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,  
However that might chance ! but an he work,  
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,

450 And sleeker shall he shine than any hog.”

Then Lancelot standing near : “ Sir Seneschal,  
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the  
hounds ;

A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know :  
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,

455 High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands

Large, fair, and fine! — Some young lad's mystery —

But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy  
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,  
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him."

460 Then Kay: "What murmurest thou of mystery?

Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?  
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!

Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd  
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!

465 Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it  
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day  
Undo thee not — and leave my man to me."

So Gareth all for glory underwent  
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage,  
470 Ate with young lads his portion by the door,  
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.  
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,  
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,  
Would hustle and harry him, and labor him  
475 Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set  
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,  
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself  
With all obedience to the King, and wrought  
All kind of service with a noble ease  
480 That graced the lowliest act in doing it.  
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,  
And one would praise the love that linkt the King

465-467. A touch of dramatic irony, whereby the tragedy to come is lightly and unwittingly predicted.

And Lancelot — how the King had saved his life  
 In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's —  
 485 For Lancelot was first in the tournament,  
 But Arthur mightiest on the battlefield —  
 Gareth was glad. Or if some other told  
 How once the wandering forester at dawn,  
 Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,  
 490 On *Caer-Eryri's* highest found the King,  
 A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,  
 "He passes to the *Isle Avilion*,  
 He passes and is heal'd and cannot die" —  
 Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,  
 495 Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,  
 Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud  
 That first they mock'd, but, after, revered him.  
 Or Gareth, telling some prodigious tale  
 Of knights who sliced a red life-bubbling way  
 500 Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held  
 All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates  
 Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,  
 Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come  
 Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind  
 505 Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.  
 Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,  
 So there were any trial of mastery,  
 He, by two yards in casting bar or stone,  
 Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,  
 510 So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,  
 Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights  
 Clash like the coming and retiring wave,

492. *Avilion*, like the *Fortunate Isles* of the *Mediterranean* peoples, *Avilion*, or *Avalon*, was a mystical *Isle* of the *Blessed* whither *Celtic* heroes were transported to live eternally.

And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy  
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

515 So for a month he wrought among the thralls;  
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,  
Repentant of the word she made him swear,  
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,  
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,  
520 Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot  
With whom he used to play at tourney once,  
When both were children, and in lonely haunts  
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,  
525 And each at either dash from either end —  
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.  
He laugh'd; he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once  
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee —  
These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —  
530 Descend into the city:" whereon he sought  
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

"I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt  
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.  
Make me thy knight — in secret! let my name  
535 Be hidd'n, and give me the first quest, I spring  
Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye  
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow  
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him:  
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,  
540 And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.

Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows  
 Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,  
 And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,  
 And uttermost obedience to the King."

545 Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees :  
 " My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.  
 For uttermost obedience make demand  
 Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,  
 No mellow master of the meats and drinks !  
 550 And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,  
 But love I shall, God willing."

And the King :

" Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,  
 Our noblest brother, and our truest man,  
 And one with me in all, he needs must know."

555 " Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,  
 Thy noblest and thy truest !"

And the King :

" But wherefore would ye men should wonder at  
 you?  
 Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,  
 And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,  
 560 Than to be noised of."

Merrily Gareth ask'd :

" Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?  
 Let be my name until I make my name !  
 My deeds will speak : it is but for a day."  
 So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm

565 Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly  
 Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.  
 Then, after summoning Lancelot privily :  
 “ I have given him the first quest : he is not proven.  
 Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,  
 570 Thou get to horse and follow him far away.  
 Cover the lions on thy shield, and see,  
 Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.”

Then that same day there past into the hall  
 A damsel of high lineage, and a brow  
 575 May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,  
 Hawk-eyes ; and lightly was her slender nose  
 Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower :  
 She into hall past with her page and cried :

“ O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,  
 580 See to the foe within ! bridge, ford, beset  
 By bandits, every one that owns a tower  
 The lord for half a league. Why sit ye there ?  
 Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,  
 Till even the lonest hold were all as free  
 585 From cursed bloodshed as thine altar-cloth  
 From that best blood it is a sin to spill.”

“ Comfort thyself,” said Arthur, “ I nor mine  
 Rest : so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,  
 The wastest moorland of our realm shall be  
 590 Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.  
 What is thy name ? thy need ? ”

“ My name ? ” she said —  
 “ Lynette, my name ; noble ; my need, a knight



To combat for my sister, Lyonors,  
 A lady of high lineage, of great lands,  
 595 And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.  
 She lives in Castle Perilous: a river  
 Runs in three loops about her living-place;  
 And o'er it are three passings, and three knights  
 Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth,  
 600 And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay'd  
 In her own castle, and so besieges her  
 To break her will, and make her wed with him;  
 And but delays his purport till thou send  
 To do the battle with him thy chief man  
 605 Sir Lancelot, whom he trusts to overthrow;  
 Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed  
 Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.  
 Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd:  
 610 "Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush  
 All wrongers of the realm. But say, these four,  
 Who be they? What the fashion of the men?"

"They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,  
 The fashion of that old knight-errantry  
 615 Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;  
 Courteous or bestial from the moment, such  
 As have nor law nor king; and three of these  
 Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,  
 Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,  
 620 Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise  
 The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,  
 A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.  
 He names himself the Night and oftener Death,

And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,  
 625 And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,  
 To show that who may slay or scape the three,  
 Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.  
 And all these four be fools, but mighty men,  
 And therefore am I come for Lancelot."

630 Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,  
 A head with kindling eyes above the throng,  
 "A boon, Sir King — this quest!" then — for he  
     mark'd  
 Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull —  
 "Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,  
 635 And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,  
 And I can topple over a hundred such.  
 Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,  
 Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,  
 And pardonable, worthy to be knight —  
 640 Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath  
 Slew the may-white: she lifted either arm,  
 "Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,  
 And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."  
 645 Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,  
 Fled down the lane of access to the King,  
 Took horse, descended the slope street, and past  
 The weird white gate, and paused without, beside  
 The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave!"

650 Now two great entries open'd from the hall,  
 At one end one that gave upon a range  
 Of level pavement where the King would pace

At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood ;  
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped  
655 Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers ;  
And out by this main doorway past the King.  
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose  
High that the highest-crested helm could ride  
Therethro' nor graze ; and by this entry fled  
660 The damsel in her wrath, and on to this  
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door  
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,  
A war-horse of the best, and near it stood  
The two that out of north had follow'd him.  
665 This bare a maiden shield, a casque ; that held  
The horse, the spear ; whereat Sir Gareth loosed  
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,  
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,  
And from it, like a fuel-smother'd fire  
670 That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as  
those  
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart  
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns  
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.  
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.  
675 Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield  
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain  
Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt  
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest  
The people, while from out of kitchen came  
680 The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd  
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,  
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,  
“ God bless the King, and all his fellowship ! ”  
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode  
685 Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy ; but as the cur  
 Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause  
 Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,  
 His owner, but remembers all, and growls  
 690 Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door  
 Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used  
 To harry and hustle.

“ Bound upon a quest  
 With horse and arms — the King hath past his  
 time —  
 My scullion knave ! Thralls, to your work again,  
 695 For an your fire be low ye kindle mine !  
 Will there be dawn in West and eve in East ?  
 Begone ! — my knave ! — belike and like enow  
 Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth  
 So shook his wits they wander in his prime —  
 700 Crazed ! How the villain lifted up his voice,  
 Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave !  
 Tut, he was tame and meek enow with me,  
 Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.  
 Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn  
 705 Whether he know me for his master yet.  
 Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance  
 Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —  
 Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,  
 Into the smoke again.”

But Lancelot said :  
 710 “ Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,  
 For that did never he whereon ye rail,  
 But ever meekly served the King in thee ?

Abide : take counsel ; for this lad is great  
 And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword.”  
 715 “ Tut, tell not me,” said Kay, “ ye are overfine  
 To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies : ”  
 Then mounted, on thro’ silent faces rode  
 Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet  
 720 Mutter’d the damsel : “ Wherefore did the King  
 Scorn me ? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least  
 He might have yielded to me one of those  
 Who tilt for lady’s love and glory here,  
 Rather than — O sweet heaven ! O fie upon him ! —  
 725 His kitchen-knave.”

To whom Sir Gareth drew —  
 And there were none but few goodlier than he —  
 Shining in arms, “ Damsel, the quest is mine.  
 Lead, and I follow.” She thereat, as one  
 That smells a foul-flesh’d agaric in the holt,  
 730 And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,  
 Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose  
 With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, “ Hence !  
 Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.  
 And look who comes behind ; ” for there was Kay.  
 735 “ Knowest thou not me ? thy master ? I am Kay.  
 We lack thee by the hearth.”

And Gareth to him,  
 “ Master no more ! too well I know thee, ay —  
 The most ungentle knight in Arthur’s hall.”

733. **Avoid**, here used in its obsolete sense, meaning “ go away.”

“Have at thee then,” said Kay: they shock’d, and  
 Kay  
 740 Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,  
 “Lead, and I follow,” and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly  
 Behind her, and the heart of her good horse  
 Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,  
 745 Perforce she stay’d, and overtaken spoke:

“What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?  
 Deem’st thou that I accept thee aught the more  
 Or love thee better, that by some device  
 Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,  
 750 Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master—thou!—  
 Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me  
 Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.”

“Damsel,” Sir Gareth answer’d gently, “say  
 Whate’er ye will, but whatsoe’er ye say,  
 755 I leave not till I finish this fair quest,  
 Or die therefore.”

“Ay, wilt thou finish it?  
 Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!  
 The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.  
 But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,  
 760 And then by such a one that thou for all  
 The kitchen brewis that was ever supt  
 Shalt not once dare to look him in the face.”

“I shall assay,” said Gareth with a smile  
 That madden’d her, and away she flash’d again



765 Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,  
And Gareth following was again beknaved :

“ Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way  
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood ;  
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves :  
770 If both be slain, I am rid of thee ; but yet,  
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine ?  
Fight, an thou canst : I have miss'd the only way.”

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong  
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled ;  
775 Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,  
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines  
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink  
To westward — in the deeps whereof a mere,  
Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl,  
780 Under the half-dead sunset glared ; and shouts  
Ascended, and there brake a servingman  
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,  
“ They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere.”  
Then Gareth, “ Bound am I to right the wrong'd,  
785 But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee.”  
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,  
“ Lead, and I follow,” Gareth cried again,  
“ Follow, I lead ! ” so down among the pines  
He plunged ; and there, black-shadow'd nigh the  
mere,  
790 And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,  
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,  
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.  
Three with good blows he quieted, but three  
Fled thro' the pines ; and Gareth loosed the stone

795 From off his neck, then in the mere beside  
 Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.  
 Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet  
 Set him, a stalwart baron, Arthur's friend.

“ Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues  
 800 Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is  
 theirs

To hate me, for my wont hath ever been  
 To catch my thief, and then like vermin here  
 Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;  
 And under this wan water many of them  
 805 Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,  
 And rise, and flickering in a grimly light  
 Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life  
 Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.  
 And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.  
 810 What guerdon will ye?”

Gareth sharply spake:  
 “ None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,  
 In uttermost obedience to the King.  
 But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage?”

Whereat the baron saying, “ I well believe  
 815 You be of Arthur's Table,” a light laugh  
 Broke from Lynette: “ Ay, truly of a truth,  
 And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave! —  
 But deem not I accept thee aught the more,  
 Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit

806. **Grimly**, an archaic adjectival form, found in Malory and occasionally in later writers. “ She had many grymly throwes.” *Morte Darthur*, viii.

820 Down on a rout of craven foresters.  
 A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.  
 Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.  
 But an this lord will yield us harborage,  
 Well."

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,  
 825 All in a full-fair manor and a rich,  
 His towers, where that day a feast had been  
 Held in high hall, and many a viand left,  
 And many a costly cate, received the three.  
 And there they placed a peacock in his pride  
 830 Before the damsel, and the baron set  
 Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

"Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,  
 Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.  
 Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,  
 835 And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot  
 To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —  
 The last a monster unsubduable  
 Of any save of him for whom I call'd —  
 Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,  
 840 'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,  
 And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I.'  
 Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,  
 'Go therefore,' and so gives the quest to him —  
 Him — here — a villain fitter to stick swine  
 845 Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,  
 Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord  
 Now look'd at one and now at other, left

The damsel by the peacock in his pride,  
 850 And, seating Gareth at another board,  
 Sat down beside him, ate and then began :

“ Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,  
 Or whether it be the maiden’s fantasy,  
 And whether she be mad, or else the King,  
 855 Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,  
 I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,  
 For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,  
 And saver of my life ; and therefore now,  
 For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh  
 860 Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back  
 To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.  
 Thy pardon ; I but speak for thine avail,  
 The saver of my life.”

And Gareth said,  
 “ Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,  
 865 Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.”

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved  
 Had, some brief space, convey’d them on their  
                   way  
 And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,  
 “ Lead, and I follow.” Haughtily she replied :

870 “ I fly no more : I allow thee for an hour.  
 Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,  
 In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks  
 Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?  
 For hard by here is one will overthrow  
 875 And slay thee ; then will I to court again,

And shame the King for only yielding me  
My champion from the ashes of his hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously :  
" Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.  
880 Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find  
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay  
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."

Then to the shore of one of those long loops  
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.  
885 Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the  
stream

Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc  
Took at a leap; and on the further side  
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold  
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,  
890 Save that the dome was purple, and above,  
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.  
And therefore the lawless warrior paced  
Unarm'd, and calling, " Damsel, is this he,  
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?  
895 For whom we let thee pass." " Nay, nay," she said,  
" Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn  
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here  
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:  
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,  
900 And slay thee unarm'd; he is not knight but knave."

Then at his call, " O daughters of the Dawn,  
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,  
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds  
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls

905 In gilt and rosy raiment came : their feet  
 In dewy grasses glisten'd ; and the hair  
 All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem  
 Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.  
 These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield  
 910 Blue also, and thereon the morning star.  
 And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,  
 Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,  
 Glorying ; and in the stream beneath him shone,  
 Immingled with heaven's azure waveringly,  
 915 The gay pavilion and the naked feet,  
 His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him : " Wherefore stare ye  
 so ?

Thou shakest in thy fear : there yet is time :  
 Flee down the valley before he get to horse.  
 920 Who will cry shame ? Thou art not knight but  
 knave."

Said Gareth ; " Damsel, whether knave or knight,  
 Far liefer had I fight a score of times  
 Than hear thee so missay me and revile.  
 Fair words were best for him who fights for thee ;  
 925 But truly foul are better, for they send  
 That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know  
 That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore  
 The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge :  
 " A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me !  
 930 Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.  
 For this were shame to do him further wrong



Than set him on his feet, and take his horse  
 And arms, and so return him to the King.  
 Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.  
 935 Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave  
 To ride with such a lady."

"Dog, thou liest!  
 I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."  
 He spake; and all at fiery speed the two  
 Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear  
 940 Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,  
 Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult  
 Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,  
 Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,  
 And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand  
 945 He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,  
 The damsel crying, "Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!"  
 Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke  
 Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fallen, "Take not my life: I yield."  
 950 And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me  
 Good — I accord it easily as a grace."  
 She reddening, "Insolent scullion! I of thee?  
 I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!"  
 "Then shall he die." And Gareth there unlaced  
 955 His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd,  
 "Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay  
 One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge  
 Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,  
 Thy life is thine at her command. Arise  
 960 And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say  
 His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave

His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.  
 Myself when I return will plead for thee.  
 Thy shield is mine — farewell ; and, damsel, thou,  
 965 Lead, and I follow.”

And fast away she fled ;  
 Then when he came upon her, spake : “ Methought,  
 Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge,  
 The savor of thy kitchen came upon me  
 A little faintlier : but the wind hath changed ;  
 970 I scent it twenty-fold.” And then she sang,  
 “ ‘ O morning star ’ — not that tall felon there  
 Whom thou, by sorcery or unhappiness  
 Or some device, hast foully overthrown, —  
 ‘ O morning star that smilest in the blue,  
 975 O star, my morning dream hath proven true,  
 Smile sweetly, thou ! my love hath smiled on me.’

“ But thou begone, take counsel, and away,  
 For hard by here is one that guards a ford —  
 The second brother in their fool's parable —  
 980 Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.  
 Care not for shame : thou art not knight but  
 knave.”

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly :  
 “ Parables ? Hear a parable of the knave.  
 When I was kitchen-knave among the rest,  
 985 Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates

971. The damsel begins to relent. Notice the arrangement of rhymes in the scattered fragments of her song. This form was a favorite with Tennyson for the incidental lyrics in his blank verse poems. Compare Elaine's Song of Love and Death; “Lancelot and Elaine,” 1000-1011.

Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,  
 'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.  
 And such a coat art thou, and thee the King  
 Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,  
 990 To worry, and not to flee — and — knight or knave —  
 The knave that doth thee service as full knight  
 Is all as good, meseems, as any knight  
 Toward thy sister's freeing."

"Ay, Sir Knave!

Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,  
 995 Being but knave, I hate thee all the more."

"Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,  
 That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

"Ay, ay," she said "but thou shalt meet thy  
 match."

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,  
 1000 Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail  
 Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun  
 Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower  
 That blows a globe of after arrowlets  
 Ten-thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce  
 shield,  
 1005 All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots  
 Before them when he turn'd from watching him.  
 He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,  
 "What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?"  
 And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,  
 1010 "Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall

1002. The flower that blows a globe of after arrowlets,  
 the dandelion.

Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms.”  
 “Ugh!” cried the Sun, and, vizoring up a red  
 And cipher face of rounded foolishness,  
 Push’d horse across the foamings of the ford,  
 1015 Whom Gareth met mid-stream : no room was there  
 For lance or tourney-skill : four strokes they struck  
 With sword, and these were mighty ; the new knight  
 Had fear he might be shamed ; but as the Sun  
 Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,  
 1020 The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream  
 Descended, and the Sun was wash’d away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford ;  
 So drew him home ; but he that fought no more,  
 As being all bone-batter’d on the rock,  
 1025 Yielded ; and Gareth sent him to the King.  
 “ Myself when I return will plead for thee.  
 Lead, and I follow.” Quietly she led.  
 “ Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again ? ”  
 “ Nay, not a point ; nor art thou victor here.  
 1030 There lies a ridge of slate across the ford ;  
 His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

“ ‘ O sun ’ — not this strong fool whom thou, Sir  
 Knave,  
 Hast overthrown thro’ mere unhappiness —  
 ‘ O sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,  
 1035 O moon, that layest all to sleep again,  
 Shine sweetly : twice my love hath smiled on me.’ ”

“ What knowest thou of love-song or of love ?  
 Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,  
 Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance, —

1040 “ ‘ O dewy flowers that open to the sun,  
 O dewy flowers that close when day is done,  
 Blow sweetly : twice my love hath smiled on me.’

“ What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,  
 To garnish meats with ? hath not our good King  
 1045 Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,  
 A foolish love for flowers ? what stick ye round  
 The pasty ? wherewithal deck the boar’s head ?  
 Flowers ? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

“ ‘ O birds that warble to the morning sky,  
 1050 O birds that warble as the day goes by,  
 Sing sweetly : twice my love hath smiled on me.’

“ What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,  
 Linnet ? what dream ye when they utter forth  
 May-music growing with the growing light,  
 1055 Their sweet sun-worship ? these be for the snare —  
 So runs thy fancy — these be for the spit,  
 Larding and basting. See thou have not now  
 Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.  
 There stands the third fool of their allegory.”

1060 For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,  
 All in a rose-red from the west, and all  
 Naked it seem’d, and glowing in the broad  
 Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight  
 That named himself the Star of Evening stood.

1065 And Gareth, “ Wherefore waits the madman  
 there  
 Naked in open dayshine ? ” “ Nay,” she cried,

“ Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins  
That fit him like his own ; and so ye cleave  
His armor off him, these will turn the blade.”

1070 Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,  
“ O brother-star, why shine ye here so low ?  
Thy ward is higher up : but have ye slain  
The damsel's champion ? ” and the damsel cried :

“ No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven  
1075 With all disaster unto thine and thee !  
For both thy younger brethren have gone down  
Before this youth ; and so wilt thou, Sir Star ;  
Art thou not old ? ”

“ Old, damsel, old and hard,  
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.”  
1080 Said Gareth, “ Old, and over-bold in brag !  
But that same strength which threw the Morning  
Star  
Can throw the Evening.”

Then that other blew  
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.  
“ Approach and arm me ! ” With slow steps from  
out  
1085 An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd  
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,  
And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm  
With but a drying evergreen for crest,  
And gave a shield whereon the star of even  
1090 Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.  
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,



They madly hurl'd together on the bridge ;  
 And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,  
 There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,  
 1095 But up like fire he started : and as oft  
 As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,  
 So many a time he vaulted up again ;  
 Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,  
 Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,  
 1100 Labor'd within him, for he seem'd as one  
 That all in later, sadder age begins  
 To war against ill uses of a life,  
 But these from all his life arise, and cry,  
 " Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us  
 down ! "

1105 He half despairs ; so Gareth seem'd to strike  
 Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,  
 " Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good  
 knight-knave —

O knave, as noble as any of all the knights —  
 Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied —  
 1110 Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round —  
 His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin —  
 Strike — strike — the wind will never change  
 again."

And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,  
 And hew'd great pieces of his armor off him,  
 1115 But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,  
 And could not wholly bring him under, more  
 Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,  
 The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs  
 For ever ; till at length Sir Gareth's brand  
 1120 Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.  
 " I have thee now ; " but forth that other sprang,

And, all unknighthlike, writhed his wiry arms  
 Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,  
 Strangled, but straining even his uttermost  
 1125 Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge  
 Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,  
 "Lead, and I follow."

But the damsel said:  
 "I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;  
 Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

1130 "O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,  
 O rainbow with three colors after rain,  
 Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.'

"Sir, — and, good faith, I fain had added —  
 Knight,  
 But that I heard thee call thyself a knave, —  
 1135 Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,  
 Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King  
 Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,  
 For thou hast ever answer'd courteously,  
 And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal  
 1140 As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,  
 Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art."

"Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame,  
 Saving that you mistrusted our good King  
 Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one  
 1145 Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;  
 Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold  
 He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet  
 To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets

His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat  
 1150 At any gentle damsel's waywardness.  
 Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:  
 And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks  
 There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,  
 Hath force to quell me."

Nigh upon that hour

1155 When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,  
 Lets down his other leg, and stretching dreams  
 Of goodly supper in the distant pool,  
 Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,  
 And told him of a cavern hard at hand,  
 1160 Where bread and baken meats and good red wine  
 Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors  
 Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein  
 Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse  
 1165 Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.  
 "Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,  
 Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock  
 The war of Time against the soul of man.  
 And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory  
 1170 From these damp walls, and taken but the form.  
 Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read —  
 In letters like to those the vexillary  
 Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt —  
 "PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIES," — "HES-  
 PERUS" —  
 1175 "NOX" — "MORS," beneath five figures, armed  
 men,

1172. A Roman vexillary, or standard bearer, carved an inscription on a cliff by the river Gelt in Cumberland.

Slab after slab, their faces forward all,  
 And running down the Soul, a shape that fled  
 With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair,  
 For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.  
 1180 "Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,  
 Who comes behind?"

For one — delay'd at first

Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay  
 To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,  
 The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood —  
 1185 Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops —  
 His blue shield-lions cover'd — softly drew  
 Behind the twain, and when he saw the star  
 Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,  
 "Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."  
 1190 And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry;  
 But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch  
 Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —  
 Went sliding down so easily, and fell,  
 That when he found the grass within his hands  
 1195 He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette:  
 Harshly she ask'd him, "Shamed and overthrown,  
 And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,  
 Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"  
 "Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son  
 1200 Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,  
 And victor of the bridges and the ford,  
 And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom  
 I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —  
 Device and sorcery and unhappiness —  
 1205 Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot an-  
 swer'd: "Prince,

O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness  
 Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,  
 Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole  
 As on the day when Arthur knighted him."

1210 Then Gareth : " Thou — Lancelot ! — thine the  
 hand

That threw me ? An some chance to mar the boast  
 Thy brethren of thee make — which could not  
 chance —

Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,  
 Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou !"

1215 Whereat the maiden, petulant : " Lancelot,  
 Why came ye not, when call'd ? and wherefore now  
 Come ye, not call'd ? I gloried in my knave,  
 Who being still rebuked would answer still  
 Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,  
 1220 The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd,  
 And only wondering wherefore play'd upon ;  
 And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.  
 Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,  
 In Arthur's presence ? Knight, knave, prince and  
 fool,

1225 I hate thee and forever."

And Lancelot said :

" Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth ! knight art thou  
 To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise,  
 To call him shamed who is but overthrown ?  
 Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.

1230 Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,  
 And overthrower from being overthrown.

With sword we have not striven ; and thy good  
horse

And thou are weary ; yet not less I felt  
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.

1235 Well hast thou done ; for all the stream is freed,  
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,  
And when reviled hast answer'd graciously,  
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince,  
knight,  
Hail, knight and prince, and of our Table Round ! ”

1240 And then when turning to Lynette he told  
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said :  
“ Ay, well — ay, well — for worse than being fool'd  
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,  
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks  
1245 And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.  
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.  
Seek, till we find.” And when they sought and  
found,  
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life  
Past into sleep ; on whom the maiden gazed :  
1250 “ Sound sleep be thine ! sound cause to sleep hast  
thou.

Wake lusty ! Seem I not as tender to him  
As any mother ? Ay, but such a one  
As all day long hath rated at her child,  
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep —  
1255 Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle  
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one  
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness !  
O Lancelot, Lancelot,” — and she clapt her hands —  
“ Full merry am I to find my goodly knave



1260 Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,  
 Else yon black felon had not let me pass,  
 To bring thee back to do the battle with him.  
 Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first ;  
 Who doubts thee victor ? so will my knight-knave  
 1265 Miss the full flower of this accomplishment."

Said Lancelot : " Peradventure he you name  
 May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,  
 Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,  
 Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well  
 1270 As he that rides him." " Lancelot-like," she said,  
 " Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all."

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the  
 shield :  
 " Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all  
 spears  
 Are rotten sticks ! ye seem agape to roar !  
 1275 Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord ! —  
 Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.  
 O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these  
 Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not  
 shame  
 Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.  
 1280 Hence : let us go."

Silent the silent field  
 They traversed. Arthur's Harp tho' summer-wan,

1281. Arthur's harp, some commentators hold this to be a constellation formed by the Pole Star, Arcturus, and another ; but from a reference in " The Last Tournament," to " the star we call the harp of Arthur up in heaven," it seems to be but a single star.

In counter motion to the clouds, allured  
 The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.  
 A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls!"  
 1285 An owl whoopt: "Hark the victor pealing there!"  
 Suddenly she that rode upon his left  
 Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying:  
 "Yield, yield him this again; 't is he must fight:  
 I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday  
 1290 Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now  
 To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have  
                   done;  
 Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow  
 In having flung the three: I see thee maim'd,  
 Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

1295 "And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.  
 You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,  
 Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery  
 Appal me from the quest."

"Nay, prince," she cried,  
 "God wot, I never look'd upon the face,  
 1300 Seeing he never rides abroad by day;  
 But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass  
 Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.  
 Always he made his mouthpiece of a page  
 Who came and went, and still reported him  
 1305 As closing in himself the strength of ten,  
 And when his anger tare him, massacring  
 Man, woman, lad, and girl — yea, the soft babe!  
 Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,  
 Monster! O prince, I went for Lancelot first,  
 1310 The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield."

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,  
Belike he wins it as the better man :  
Thus — and not else !"

But Lancelot on him urged

All the devisings of their chivalry  
1315 When one might meet a mightier than himself ;  
How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,  
And so fill up the gap where force might fail  
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth: "Here be rules. I know but one—  
1320 To dash against mine enemy and to win.  
Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,  
And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee!" sigh'd  
Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew  
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode  
1325 In converse till she made her palfrey halt,  
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, "There."  
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd  
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,  
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak  
1330 Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,  
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn  
Beside it hanging ; which Sir Gareth graspt,  
And so, before the two could hinder him,  
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.  
1335 Echo'd the walls ; a light twinkled ; anon  
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew ;  
Whereon were hollow tramlings up and down  
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past ;

Till high above him, circled with her maids,  
 1340 The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,  
 Beautiful among lights, and waving to him  
 White hands and courtesy ; but when the prince  
 Three times had blown — after long hush — at  
 last —

The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,  
 1345 Thro' those black foldings, that which housed  
 therein.

High on a night-black horse, in night-black arms,  
 With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,  
 And crown'd with fleshless laughter — some ten  
 steps —

In the half-light — thro' the dim dawn — advanced  
 1350 The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly :

“ Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,  
 Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,  
 But must, to make the terror of thee more,  
 1355 Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries  
 Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,  
 Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers  
 As if for pity ? ” But he spake no word ;  
 Which set the horror higher : a maiden swoon'd ;  
 1360 The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,  
 As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death ;  
 Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm ;  
 And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt  
 Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

1365 At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,  
 And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with  
 him.

Then those that did not blink the terror saw  
 That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.  
 But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.  
 1370 Half fell to right and half to left and lay.  
 Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm  
 As throughly as the skull; and out from this  
 Issued the bright face of a blooming boy  
 Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, "Knight,  
 1375 Slay me not: my three brethren bade me do it,  
 To make a horror all about the house,  
 And stay the world from Lady Lyonors;  
 They never dream'd the passes would be past."  
 Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one  
 1380 Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child,  
 What madness made thee challenge the chief knight  
 Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bade me do it.  
 They hate the King and Lancelot, the King's  
 friend;  
 They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,  
 1385 They never dream'd the passes could be past."

Then sprang the happier day from underground;  
 And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance  
 And revel and song, made merry over Death,  
 As being after all their foolish fears  
 1390 And horrors only proven a blooming boy.  
 So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times  
 Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,  
 But he that told it later says Lynette.

1392-1394. He that told the tale in older times, Malory;  
 he that told it later, Tennyson.

## LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,  
 Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,  
 High in her chamber up a tower to the east  
 Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;  
 5 Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray  
 Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;  
 Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it  
 A case of silk, and braided thereupon  
 All the devices blazon'd on the shield  
 10 In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,  
 A border fantasy of branch and flower,  
 And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.  
 Nor rested thus content, but day by day,  
 Leaving her household and good father, climb'd  
 15 That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,  
 Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,  
 Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,

Lancelot and Elaine, under the title of "Elaine," first appeared in the volume of 1859. The story is told at considerable length by Malory, and Tennyson has followed his narrative perhaps more closely than in any other of the "Idylls." Standing just beyond the middle of the series, as finally arranged, it strikes the first clear note of the corruption which was to work the ruin of King Arthur and his Round Table — the guilty love of Lancelot and the Queen. We repeat our suggestion of the introductory sketch that the student should turn to Malory (Book xviii. chap. 8-20) for an example of the manner in which Tennyson and Malory throw light upon each other.

2. The lily maid; "This old baron [Sir Bernard of Astolat] had a daughter that time that was called that time the fair maid of Astolat; . . . and her name was Elaine le Blank" (*blanche*, white).



Now made a pretty history to herself  
 Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,  
 20 And every scratch a lance had made upon it,  
 Conjecturing when and where : this cut is fresh ;  
 That ten years back ; this dealt him at Caerlyle ;  
 That at Caerleon ; this at Camelot :  
 And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there !  
 25 And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God  
 Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,  
 And saved him : so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield  
 Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name ?  
 30 He left it with her, when he rode to tilt  
 For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,  
 Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name  
 Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,  
 35 Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,

28. A passage in Malory tells how she came by the shield, and shows how Tennyson adapted the tone of his original.

"Then she told him as ye have heard tofore, and how her father betook him her brother to do him service, and how her father lent him her brother Sir Tirre's shield, — And here with me he left his own shield. For what cause did he so ? said Sir Gawaine. For this cause, said the damsel, for his shield was too well known among many noble knights. Ah, fair damsel, said Sir Gawaine, please it you let me have a sight of that shield. Sir, said she, it is in my chamber covered with a case, and if ye will come with me, ye shall see it."

35. *Lyonesse*, a portion of southwestern England, of which Sir Walter Besant's novel, "Armored of Lyonesse," has helped to revive the memory.

35-55. For a vivid picture of this scene, and others in the poem, the student would do well to turn to Doré's illustrations of "Elaine."

Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
 A horror lived about the tarn, and clave  
 Like its own mists to all the mountain side:  
 For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
 40 And fought together; but their names were lost;  
 And each had slain his brother at a blow;  
 And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:  
 And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,  
 And lichen'd into color with the crags:  
 45 And he, that once was king, had on a crown  
 Of diamonds, one in front and four aside.  
 And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,  
 All in a misty moonshine, unawares  
 Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull  
 50 Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown  
 Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims  
 Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:  
 And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,  
 And set it on his head, and in his heart  
 55 Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be King."

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems  
 Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his  
 knights,  
 Saying, "These jewels, whereupon I chanced  
 Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's —  
 60 For public use: henceforward let there be,  
 Once every year, a joust for one of these:  
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn  
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow  
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive  
 65 The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land  
 Hereafter, which God hinder." Thus he spoke:  
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and  
 still

Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,  
 With purpose to present them to the Queen,  
 70 When all were won ; but meaning all at once  
 To snare her royal fancy with a boon  
 Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last  
 And largest, Arthur, holding then his court  
 75 Hard on the river nigh the place which now  
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust  
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh  
 Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,  
 "Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move  
 80 To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye  
 know it."

"Then will ye miss," he answer'd, "the great deeds  
 Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,  
 A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen  
 Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly  
 85 On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.  
 He thinking that he read her meaning there,  
 "Stay with me, I am sick ; my love is more  
 Than many diamonds," yielded ; and a heart  
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen  
 90 (However much he yearn'd to make complete  
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)  
 Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,  
 "Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,  
 And lets me from the saddle ;" and the King

75. **The place**, obviously London.

91. **The tale**, the full number, as in Exodus, v. 8 : "And the tale of bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them."

94. **Lets me** = *keeps, prevents me* ; a common, obsolete use of *let*, as in the Prayer Book collect : "sore let and hindered in running the race."

95 Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.  
No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

“ To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !  
Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights  
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd  
100 Will murmur, ‘ Lo the shameless ones, who take  
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone ! ’ ”  
Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain :  
“ Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,  
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.  
105 Then of the crowd ye took no more account  
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,  
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,  
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,  
Them surely can I silence with all ease.  
110 But now my loyal worship is allow’d  
Of all men : many a bard, without offence,  
Has link’d our names together in his lay,  
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,  
The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast  
115 Have pledged us in this union, while the King  
Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?  
Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,  
Now weary of my service and devoir,  
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ? ”

120 She broke into a little scornful laugh :  
“ Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,

118. *Devoir*, duty. In common speech it has become the word on which Hood punned in “ Faithless Nelly Gray : ” —

“ So he went up to pay his devours,  
When he devoured his pay ! ”

That passionate perfection, my good lord —  
 But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?  
 He never spake word of reproach to me,  
 125 He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,  
 He cares not for me: only here to-day  
 There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes:  
 Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else  
 Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,  
 130 And swearing men to vows impossible,  
 To make them like himself: but, friend, to me  
 He is all fault who has no fault at all:  
 For who loves me must have a touch of earth;  
 The low sun makes the color: I am yours,  
 135 Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.  
 And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:  
 The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream  
 When sweetest; and the vermin voices here  
 May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting."

140 Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:  
 "And with what face, after my pretext made,  
 Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I  
 Before a King who honors his own word,  
 As if it were his God's?"

"Yea," said the Queen,  
 145 "A moral child without the craft to rule,  
 Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,  
 If I must find you wit: we hear it said  
 That men go down before your spear at a touch,  
 But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,  
 150 This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:

122. That passionate perfection; Guinevere thought of the king as Maud's lover of her: —

"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null."

Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King  
 Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,  
 As all for glory; for to speak him true,  
 Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,  
 155 No keener hunter after glory breathes.  
 He loves it in his knights more than himself:  
 They prove to him his work: win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,  
 Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,  
 160 He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,  
 Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,  
 And there among the solitary downs,  
 Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;  
 Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,  
 165 That all in loops and links among the dales  
 Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
 Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.  
 Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.  
 Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man  
 170 Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.  
 And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;  
 And issuing found the Lord of Astolat  
 With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,  
 Moving to meet him in the castle court;  
 175 And close behind them stept the lily maid  
 Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house  
 There was not: some light jest among them rose  
 With laughter dying down as the great knight  
 Approach'd them: then the Lord of Astolat:  
 180 "Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name  
 Livest between the lips? for by thy state

173. **Torre**, an improvement upon *Tirre*, as Malory called the son.



And presence I might guess the chief of those,  
 After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.  
 Him have I seen : the rest, his Table Round,  
 185 Known as they are, to me they are unknown."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :  
 " Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,  
 What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield,  
 But since I go to joust as one unknown  
 190 At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not,  
 Hereafter ye shall know me — and the shield —  
 I pray you lend me one, if such you have,  
 Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat, " Here is Torre's :  
 195 Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre ;  
 And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.  
 His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,  
 " Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."  
 Here laugh'd the father saying, " Fie, Sir Churl,  
 200 Is that an answer for a noble knight ?  
 Allow him ! but Lavaine, my younger here,  
 He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,  
 Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,  
 And set it in this damsel's golden hair,  
 205 To make her thrice as wilful as before."

" Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not  
 Before this noble knight," said young Lavaine,  
 " For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre :  
 He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go :  
 210 A jest, no more ! for, knight, the maiden dreamt  
 That some one put this diamond in her hand,  
 And that it was too slippery to be held,

And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,  
 The castle-well, belike; and then I said  
 215 That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it  
 (But all was jest and joke among ourselves)  
 Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.  
 But, father, give me leave, an if he will,  
 To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:  
 220 Win shall I not, but do my best to win:  
 Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

"So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,  
 Smiling a moment, "with your fellowship  
 O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,  
 225 Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:  
 And you shall win this diamond — as I hear,  
 It is a fair large diamond, — if ye may,  
 And yield it to this maiden, if ye will."  
 "A fair large diamond," added plain Sir Torre,  
 230 "Such be for queens, and not for simple maids."  
 Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,  
 Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,  
 Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement  
 Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,  
 235 Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd:  
 "If what is fair be but for what is fair,  
 And only queens are to be counted so,  
 Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid  
 Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,  
 240 Not violating the bond of like to like."

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,  
 Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,

218. An *if*; *an* is really an equivalent of *if*, though both are sometimes used for the second word.

Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.  
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,  
245 In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,  
Had been the sleeker for it; but in him  
250 His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul.  
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man  
That ever among ladies ate in hall,  
255 And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.  
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,  
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes  
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

260 Then the great knight, the darling of the court,  
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall  
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain  
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,  
But kindly man moving among his kind :  
265 Whom they with meats and vintage of their best,  
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.  
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,  
And ever well and readily answer'd he :  
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,  
270 Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,  
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,  
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.  
“ He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design  
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd .  
275 But I, my sons, and little daughter fled

From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods  
 By the great river in a boatman's hut.  
 Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke  
 The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill."

280 "O there, great lord, doubtless," Lavaine said,  
 rapt

By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth  
 Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought.  
 O tell us — for we live apart — you know  
 Of Arthur's glorious wars." And Lancelot spoke  
 285 And answer'd him at full, as having been  
 With Arthur in the fight which all day long  
 Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;  
 And in the four loud battles by the shore  
 Of Duglas ; that on Bassa ; then the war  
 290 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts  
 Of Celidon the forest : and again  
 By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King  
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,  
 Carved of one emerald center'd in a sun  
 295 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed ;  
 And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,  
 When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse

279. **Badon Hill**, a battle of actual history, in which the Britons defeated the West Saxons.

285-300. The names of these battles Tennyson took from other pages than Malory's.

297. **The wild White Horse**. In "Guinevere" the "Lords of the White Horse" are described as "the brood by Hengist left," the White Horse being the Saxon symbol. White Horse Hill in Berkshire, on which King Alfred is said to have wrought the great figure of a white horse covering an acre or two of ground, to commemorate a victory over the Danes, may be seen to-day in evidence of the ancient symbol. "The Scouring

Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;  
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,  
 300 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,  
 Where many a heathen fell ; “and on the mount  
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King  
 Charge at the head of all his Table Round,  
 And all his legions crying Christ and him,  
 305 And break them ; and I saw him, after, stand  
 High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume  
 Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,  
 And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,  
 ‘ They are broken, they are broken ! ’ for the King,  
 310 However mild he seems at home, nor cares  
 For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts —  
 For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs  
 Saying, his knights are better men than he —  
 Yet in this heathen war the fire of God  
 315 Fills him : I never saw his like : there lives  
 No greater leader.”

While he utter'd this,  
 Low to her own heart said the lily maid,  
 “ Save your great self, fair lord : ” and when he fell  
 From talk of war to traits of pleasantry —  
 320 Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind —  
 She still took note that when the living smile  
 Died from his lips, across him came a cloud  
 Of melancholy severe, from which again,  
 Whenever in her hovering to and fro  
 325 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,  
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness

of the White Horse,” by Thomas Hughes, preserves many of the traditions of the Hill, and tells of the sports of 1857 in celebration of the local festival in honor of the landmark.

Of manners and of nature : and she thought  
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.  
 And all night long his face before her lived,  
 330 As when a painter, poring on a face,  
 Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man  
 Behind it and so paints him that his face,  
 The shape and color of a mind and life,  
 Lives for his children, ever at its best  
 335 And fullest ; so the face before her lived,  
 Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full  
 Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.  
 Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought  
 She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.  
 340 First as in fear, step after step, she stole  
 Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating :  
 Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,  
 " This shield, my friend, where is it ? " and Lavaine  
 Past inward, as she came from out the tower.  
 345 There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and  
 smooth'd  
 The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.  
 Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew  
 Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed  
 Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
 350 The maiden standing in the dewy light.  
 He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.  
 Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,  
 For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood  
 Rapt on his face as if it were a god's.  
 355 Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,  
 That he should wear her favor at the tilt.

338. *Rathe*, early. " The rathe primrose," in Milton's " Lycidas," is the most familiar instance of the word. We have it in its comparative, *rather*.



She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.  
“Fair lord, whose name I know not — noble it is,  
I well believe, the noblest — will you wear  
360 My favor at this tourney?” “Nay,” said he,  
“Fair lady, since I never yet have worn  
Favor of any lady in the lists.  
Such is my wont, as those who know me know.”  
“Yea, so,” she answer’d; “then in wearing mine  
365 Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,  
That those who know should know you.” And he  
turn’d  
Her counsel up and down within his mind,  
And found it true, and answer’d: “True, my child.  
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:  
370 What is it?” and she told him “A red sleeve  
Broider’d with pearls,” and brought it: then he  
bound  
Her token on his helmet, with a smile,  
Saying, “I never yet have done so much  
For any maiden living,” and the blood  
375 Sprang to her face and fill’d her with delight;  
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine  
Returning brought the yet-unblazon’d shield,  
His brother’s; which he gave to Lancelot,  
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:  
380 “Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield  
In keeping till I come.” “A grace to me,”  
She answer’d, “twice to-day. I am your squire!”  
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, “Lily maid,  
For fear our people call you lily maid  
385 In earnest, let me bring your color back;  
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed.”  
So kiss’d her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,  
And thus they moved away: she stay’d a minute,

Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there —  
 390 Her bright hair blown about the serious face  
 Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss —  
 Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield  
 In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off  
 Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.  
 395 Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,  
 There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away  
 Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,  
 To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight  
 400 Not far from Camelot, now for forty years  
 A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and pray'd,  
 And ever laboring had scoop'd himself  
 In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
 On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
 405 And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;  
 The green light from the meadows underneath  
 Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;  
 And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees  
 And poplars made a noise of falling showers.  
 410 And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,  
 And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,  
 They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away:  
 Then Lancelot saying, "Hear, but hold my name  
 415 Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,"  
 Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,  
 Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,  
 But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?"  
 And after muttering "The great Lancelot,"  
 420 At last he got his breath and answer'd, "One,

One have I seen — that other, our liege lord,  
 The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,  
 Of whom the people talk mysteriously,  
 He will be there — then were I stricken blind  
 425 That minute, I might say that I had seen."

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists  
 By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes  
 Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round  
 Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,  
 430 Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat  
 Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
 Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
 And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
 And from the carven-work behind him crept  
 435 Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
 Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
 Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
 Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found  
 The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
 440 Yet with all ease, so tender was the work :  
 And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,  
 Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,  
 " Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,  
 445 The truer lance : but there is many a youth  
 Now crescent, who will come to all I am  
 And overcome it ; and in me there dwells  
 No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
 Of greatness to know well I am not great :

422. *Pendragon* ; this name, originally applied by Geoffrey of Monmouth to Uther, is used here as elsewhere for Arthur.

446. *Crescent*, literally *increasing*.

450 There is the man." And Lavaine gaped upon him  
 As on a thing miraculous, and anon  
 The trumpets blew; and then did either side,  
 They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,  
 Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,  
 455 Meet in the midst, and there so furiously  
 Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,  
 If any man that day were left afield,  
 The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.  
 And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw  
 460 Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it  
 Against the stronger: little need to speak  
 Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,  
 Count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,  
 465 Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,  
 Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight  
 Should do and almost overdo the deeds  
 Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo!  
 What is he? I do not mean the force alone —  
 470 The grace and versatility of the man!  
 Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn  
 Favor of any lady in the lists?  
 Not such his wont, as we that know him know."  
 "How then? who then?" a fury seized them all,  
 475 A fiery family passion for the name  
 Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.  
 They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds,  
 and thus  
 Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made  
 In moving, all together down upon him  
 480 Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,  
 453. The lists, the enclosure; in modern parlance, the ring.

Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all  
 Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,  
 Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,  
 And him that helms it, so they overbore  
 485 Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear  
 Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear  
 Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head  
 Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully ;  
 490 He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,  
 And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.  
 He up the side, sweating with agony, got,  
 But thought to do while he might yet endure,  
 And being lustily holpen by the rest,  
 495 His party, — tho' it seem'd half-miracle  
 To those he fought with, — drave his kith and kin,  
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,  
 Back to the barrier ; then the trumpets blew  
 Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve  
 500 Of scarlet, and the pearls ; and all the knights,  
 His party, cried " Advance and take thy prize  
 The diamond ; " but he answer'd, " Diamond me  
 No diamonds ! for God's love, a little air !  
 Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death !  
 505 Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not."

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field  
 With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.  
 There from his charger down he slid, and sat,  
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, " Draw the lance-head : "  
 510 " Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,

502, 503. **Diamond me No diamonds** ; a common form of denial and refusal, often found in the Elizabethan writers.

"I dread me, if I draw it, you will die."  
 But he, "I die already with it: draw —  
 Draw," — and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave  
 A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,  
 515 And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank  
 For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.  
 Then came the hermit out and bare him in,  
 There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt  
 Whether to live or die, for many a week  
 520 Hid from the wide world's rumor by the grove  
 Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,  
 And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,  
 His party, knights of utmost North and West,  
 525 Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,  
 Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,  
 "Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,  
 Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize  
 Untaken, crying that his prize is death."  
 530 "Heaven hinder," said the King, "that such an one,  
 So great a knight as we have seen to-day —  
 He seem'd to me another Lancelot —  
 Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot —  
 He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,  
 535 O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.  
 Wounded and wearied, needs must he be near.  
 I charge you that you get at once to horse.  
 And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you  
 Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:

514. **A marvellous great shriek**; Malory has it: "And he gave a great shriek, and a marvellous grisly groan, and his blood brast out nigh a pint at once, that at last he sank down, and so swooned pale and deadly."



540 His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him  
 No customary honor: since the knight  
 Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,  
 Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take  
 This diamond, and deliver it, and return,  
 545 And bring us where he is, and how he fares,  
 And cease not from your quest until ye find."

So saying, from the carven flower above,  
 To which it made a restless heart, he took,  
 And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat  
 550 At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,  
 With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince  
 In the mid might and flourish of his May,  
 Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,  
 And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint  
 555 And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal  
 Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,  
 Nor often loyal to his word, and now  
 Wroth that the King's command to sally forth  
 In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave  
 560 The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;  
 While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,  
 Past, thinking, "Is it Lancelot who hath come  
 Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain  
 565 Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,  
 And ridd'n away to die?" So fear'd the King,  
 And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.  
 Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,  
 "Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, lord," she said,  
 570 "And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen  
 amazed,

545. Bring us, etc. = bring us news.

“ Was he not with you? won he not your prize? ”  
 “ Nay, but one like him.” “ Why that like was he.”  
 And when the King demanded how she knew,  
 Said, “ Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,  
 575 Than Lancelot told me of a common talk  
 That men went down before his spear at a touch,  
 But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name  
 Conquer’d; and therefore would he hide his name  
 From all men, ev’n the King, and to this end  
 580 Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,  
 That he might joust unknown of all, and learn  
 If his old prowess were in aught decay’d;  
 And added, ‘ Our true Arthur, when he learns,  
 Will well allow my pretext, as for gain  
 585 Of purer glory.’ ”

Then replied the King:

“ Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,  
 In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,  
 To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.  
 Surely his King and most familiar friend  
 590 Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,  
 Albeit I know my knights fantastical,  
 So fine a fear in our large Lancelot  
 Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains  
 But little cause for laughter: his own kin —  
 595 Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this! —  
 His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;  
 So that he went sore wounded from the field:  
 Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine  
 That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.  
 600 He wore, against his wont, upon his helm

583. Our true Arthur, see l. 151.

592. Fine = subtle.

A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,  
Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,  
"Thy hopes are mine," and saying that, she choked,  
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,  
605 Past to her chamber, and there flung herself  
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,  
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,  
And shriek'd out "Traitor!" to the unhearing wall,  
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,  
610 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round  
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,  
Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,  
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat:  
615 Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid  
Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot,  
lord?  
What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He  
won."  
"I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts  
Hurt in the side," whereat she caught her breath;  
620 Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;  
Thereon she smote her hand; wellnigh she swoon'd;  
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came  
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince  
Reported who he was, and on what quest  
625 Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find  
The victor, but had ridd'n a random round  
To seek him, and had wearied of the search.  
To whom the Lord of Astolat, "Bide with us,  
And ride no more at random, noble Prince!  
630 Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;

This will he send or come for : furthermore  
 Our son is with him ; we shall hear anon,  
 Needs must we hear." To this the courteous Prince  
 Accorded with his wonted courtesy,  
 635 Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,  
 And stay'd ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :  
 Where could be found face daintier ? then her shape,  
 From forehead down to foot, perfect — again  
 From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd :  
 640 " Well — if I bide, lo ! this wild flower for me ! "  
 And oft they met among the garden yews,  
 And there he set himself to play upon her  
 With sallying wit, free flashes from a height  
 Above her, graces of the court, and songs,  
 645 Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence  
 And amorous adulation, till the maid  
 Rebell'd against it, saying to him, " Prince,  
 O loyal nephew of our noble King,  
 Why ask you not to see the shield he left,  
 650 Whence you might learn his name ? Why slight  
         your King  
 And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove  
 No surer than our falcon yesterday,  
 Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went  
 To all the winds ? " " Nay, by mine head," said he,  
 655 " I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,  
 O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes ;  
 But an ye will it let me see the shield."  
 And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw  
 Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,  
 660 Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd :

636-700. The episode of Gawain's trying to win Elaine's love is Tennyson's invention. Malory says nothing of it, though in his narrative Gawain came to Astolat.

“ Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!”

“ And right was I,” she answer’d merrily, “ I,  
Who dream’d my knight the greatest knight of all.”

“ And if *I* dream’d,” said Gawain, “ that you love  
665 This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!  
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?”

Full simple was her answer, “ What know I?

My brethren have been all my fellowship;

And I, when often they have talk’d of love,

670 Wish’d it had been my mother, for they talk’d,  
Meseem’d, of what they knew not; so myself —

I know not if I know what true love is,

But if I know, then, if I love not him,

I know there is none other I can love.”

675 “ Yea, by God’s death,” said he, “ ye love him well,

But would not, knew ye what all others know,

And whom he loves.” “ So be it,” cried Elaine,

And lifted her fair face and moved away:

But he pursued her, calling, “ Stay a little!

680 One golden minute’s grace! he wore your sleeve:

Would he break faith with one I may not name?

Must our true man change like a leaf at last?

Nay — like enow: why then, far be it from me

To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!

685 And, damsel, for I deem you know full well

Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave

My quest with you; the diamond also: here!

For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;

And if he love, it will be sweet to have it

690 From your own hand; and whether he love or not

A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well

A thousand times! — a thousand times farewell!

Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two

May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,

695 So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,  
We two shall know each other."

Then he gave,  
And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,  
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest  
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went  
700 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past; there told the King  
What the King knew, "Sir Lancelot is the knight."  
And added, "Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;  
But fail'd to find him tho' I rode all round  
705 The region: but I lighted on the maid  
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him: and to her,  
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,  
I gave the diamond: she will render it;  
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place."

710 The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,  
"Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more  
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget  
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,  
715 For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,  
Linger'd that other, staring after him;  
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad  
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.  
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed.  
720 "The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,  
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat."  
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all  
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most



Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame  
 725 Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.  
 She, that had heard the noise of it before,  
 But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,  
 Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.  
 So ran the tale like fire about the court,  
 730 Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared :  
 Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice  
 Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,  
 And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid  
 Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat  
 735 With lips severely placid, felt the knot  
 Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen  
 Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor  
 Beneath the banquet, where the meats became  
 As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

740 But far away the maid in Astolat,  
 Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept  
 The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,  
 Crept to her father, while he mused alone,  
 Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,  
 745 "Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
 Is yours who let me have my will, and now,  
 Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?"  
 "Nay," said he, "surely." "Wherefore, let me  
 hence,"  
 She answer'd, "and find out our dear Lavaine."  
 750 "Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine :  
 Bide," answer'd he : "we needs must hear anon  
 Of him, and of that other." "Ay," she said,  
 "And of that other, for I needs must hence

728. Marr'd her friend's aim, etc. = received the news so  
 calmly that the gossip was disappointed of her purpose.

And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,  
 755 And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,  
 Lest I be found as faithless in the quest  
 As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.  
 Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams  
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
 760 Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.  
 The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,  
 My father, to be sweet and serviceable  
 To noble knights in sickness, as ye know,  
 When these have worn their tokens: let me hence,  
 765 I pray you." Then her father nodding said,  
 "Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,  
 Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,  
 Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it —  
 And sure I think this fruit is hung too high  
 770 For any mouth to gape for save a queen's —  
 Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,  
 Being so very wilful you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,  
 And while she made her ready for her ride,  
 775 Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,  
 "Being so very wilful you must go,"  
 And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,  
 "Being so very wilful you must die."  
 But she was happy enough and shook it off,  
 780 As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;  
 And in her heart she answer'd it and said,  
 "What matter, so I help him back to life?"  
 Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide  
 Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs  
 785 To Camelot, and before the city-gates  
 Came on her brother with a happy face

Making a roan horse caper and curvet  
 For pleasure all about a field of flowers :  
 Whom when she saw, "Lavaine," she cried, "La-  
 vaine,

- 790 How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?" He amazed,  
 "Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot?  
 How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"  
 But when the maid had told him all her tale,  
 Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods  
 795 Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,  
 Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,  
 Past up the still rich city to his kin,  
 His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;  
 And her Lavaine across the poplar grove  
 800 Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque  
 Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,  
 Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,  
 Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,  
 Because he had not loosed it from his helm,  
 805 But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.  
 And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,  
 His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands  
 Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream  
 Of dragging down his enemy made them move.  
 810 Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,  
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
 Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.  
 The sound not wonted in a place so still  
 Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes  
 815 Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,  
 "Your prize the diamond sent you by the King:"  
 His eyes glisten'd: she fancied "Is it for me?"  
 And when the maid had told him all the tale

Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest  
 820 Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt  
 Full lowly by the corners of his bed,  
 And laid the diamond in his open hand.  
 Her face was near, and as we kiss the child  
 That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.  
 825 At once she slipt like water to the floor.  
 "Alas," he said, "your ride hath wearied you.  
 Rest must you have." "No rest for me," she said ;  
 "Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest."  
 What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,  
 830 Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,  
 Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself  
 In the heart's colors on her simple face ;  
 And Lancelot look'd and was perplex't in mind,  
 And being weak in body said no more ;  
 835 But did not love the color ; woman's love,  
 Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd  
 Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,  
 And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates  
 840 Far up the dim rich city to her kin ;  
 There bode the night ; but woke with dawn, and  
 past  
 Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,  
 Thence to the cave : so day by day she past  
 In either twilight ghost-like to and fro  
 845 Gliding, and every day she tended him,  
 And likewise many a night : and Lancelot  
 Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt  
 Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times  
 Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem  
 850 Uncourteous, even he : but the meek maid

Sweetly forebore him ever, being to him  
 Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,  
 Milder than any mother to a sick child,  
 And never woman yet, since man's first fall,  
 855 Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love  
 Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all  
 The simples and the science of that time,  
 Told him that her fine care had saved his life.  
 And the sick man forgot her simple blush,  
 860 Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,  
 Would listen for her coming and regret  
 Her parting step, and held her tenderly,  
 And loved her with all love except the love  
 Of man and woman when they love their best,  
 865 Closest and sweetest, and had died the death  
 In any knightly fashion for her sake.  
 And peradventure had he seen her first  
 She might have made this and that other world  
 Another world for the sick man; but now  
 870 The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,  
 His honor rooted in dishonor stood,  
 And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made  
 Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.  
 875 These, as but born of sickness, could not live:  
 For when the blood ran lustier in him again,  
 Full often the bright image of one face,  
 Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,  
 Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.  
 880 Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace  
 Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,  
 Or short and coldly, and she knew right well  
 What the rough sickness meant, but what this  
 meant

She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,  
 885 And drave her ere her time across the fields  
 Far into the rich city, where alone  
 She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain : it cannot be.  
 He will not love me : how then ? must I die ?"  
 Then as a little helpless innocent bird,  
 890 That has but one plain passage of few notes,  
 Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
 For all an April morning, till the ear  
 Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid  
 Went half the night repeating, "Must I die ?"  
 895 And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,  
 And found no ease in turning or in rest ;  
 And "Him or death," she mutter'd, "death or him,"  
 Again and like a burthen, "Him or death."

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,  
 900 To Astolat returning rode the three.  
 There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self  
 In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,  
 She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought  
 "If I be loved, these are my festal robes,  
 905 If not, the victim's flowers before he fall."  
 And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid  
 That she should ask some goodly gift of him  
 For her own self or hers ; "and do not shun  
 To speak the wish most near to your true heart ;  
 910 Such service have ye done me, that I make  
 My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I  
 In mine own land, and what I will I can."  
 Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,  
 But like a ghost without the power to speak.

905. The victim's flowers, with which the beast was  
 decked for sacrifice.



915 And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,  
 And bode among them yet a little space  
 Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced  
 He found her in among the garden yews,  
 And said, "Delay no longer, speak your wish,  
 920 Seeing I go to-day:" then out she brake:  
 "Going? and we shall never see you more.  
 And I must die for want of one bold word."  
 "Speak: that I live to hear," he said, "is yours."  
 Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:  
 925 "I have gone mad. I love you: let me die."  
 "Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"  
 And innocently extending her white arms,  
 "Your love," she said, "your love—to be your  
 wife."

And Lancelot answer'd, "Had I chosen to wed,  
 930 I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:  
 But now there never will be wife of mine."  
 "No, no," she cried, "I care not to be wife,  
 But to be with you still, to see your face,  
 To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world."  
 935 And Lancelot answer'd, "Nay, the world, the  
 world,  
 All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart  
 To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
 To blare its own interpretation—nay,  
 Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,  
 940 And your good father's kindness." And she said,  
 "Not to be with you, not to see your face—  
 Alas for me then, my good days are done."  
 "Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, "ten times nay!  
 This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,

923. That I live to hear, etc. = it is through you that I am  
 alive.

945 Most common : yea, I know it of mine own self :  
 And you yourself will smile at your own self  
 Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
 To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age :  
 And then will I, for true you are and sweet,  
 950 Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,  
 More specially should your good knight be poor,  
 Endow you with broad land and territory  
 Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,  
 So that would make you happy : furthermore,  
 955 Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,  
 In all your quarrels will I be your knight.  
 This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,  
 And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke

She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale  
 960 Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied :  
 "Of all this will I nothing ;" and so fell,  
 And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of  
yew

Their talk had pierced, her father : "Ay, a flash,  
 965 I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.  
 Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.  
 I pray you, use some rough discourtesy  
 To blunt or break her passion."

Lancelot said,

"That were against me : what I can I will ;"  
 970 And there that day remain'd, and toward even  
 Sent for his shield : full meekly rose the maid,  
 Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield ;

Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,  
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd  
975 Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.  
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound ;  
And she by tact of love was well aware  
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.  
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,  
980 Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away.  
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat :  
His very shield was gone ; only the case,  
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.  
985 But still she heard him, still his picture form'd  
And grew between her and the pictured wall.  
Then came her father, saying in low tones,  
“ Have comfort,” whom she greeted quietly.  
Then came her brethren saying, “ Peace to thee,  
990 Sweet sister,” whom she answer'd with all calm.  
But when they left her to herself again,  
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field  
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd ; the owls  
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt  
995 Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms  
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,  
And call'd her song “ The Song of Love and  
Death,”  
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

1000 “ Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ;  
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“ Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must  
be :

Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.

1005 O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

“ Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,  
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“ I fain would follow love, if that could be ;

1010 I needs must follow death, who calls for me ;

Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.”

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,  
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind  
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and  
thought

1015 With shuddering, “ Hark the Phantom of the  
house

That ever shrieks before a death,” and call'd  
The father, and all three in hurry and fear  
Ran to her, and lo ! the blood-red light of dawn  
Flared on her face, she shrilling, “ Let me die ! ”

1020 As when we dwell upon a word we know,  
Repeating, till the word we know so well  
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,  
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought  
“ Is this Elaine ? ” till back the maiden fell,

1025 Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,  
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.  
At last she said, “ Sweet brothers, yesternight  
I seem'd a curious little maid again,  
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,

- 1030 And when ye used to take me with the flood  
 Up the great river in the boatman's boat.  
 Only ye would not pass beyond the cape  
 That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt  
 Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
- 1035 And yet I cried because ye would not pass  
 Beyond it, and far up the shining flood  
 Until we found the palace of the King.  
 And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd  
 That I was all alone upon the flood,
- 1040 And then I said, 'Now shall I have my will:'  
 And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.  
 So let me hence that I may pass at last  
 Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,  
 Until I find the palace of the King.
- 1045 There will I enter in among them all,  
 And no man there will dare to mock at me;  
 But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,  
 And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;  
 Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
- 1050 Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade me one:  
 And there the King will know me and my love,  
 And there the Queen herself will pity me,  
 And all the gentle court will welcome me,  
 And after my long voyage I shall rest!"

1055 "Peace," said her father, "O my child, ye seem  
 Light-headed, for what force is yours to go  
 So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look  
 On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?"

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move  
 1060 And bluster into stormy sobs and say,  
 "I never loved him: an I meet with him,

L. of C.

I care not howsoever great he be,  
 Then will I strike at him and strike him down,  
 Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,  
 1065 For this discomfort he hath done the house."

To whom the gentle sister made reply,  
 "Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,  
 Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault  
 Not to love me, than it is mine to love  
 1070 Him of all men who seems to me the highest."

"'Highest?'" the father answer'd, echoing  
 "highest"

(He meant to break the passion in her), "nay,  
 Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;  
 But this I know, for all the people know it,  
 1075 He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:  
 And she returns his love in open shame.  
 If this be high, what is it to be low?"

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:  
 "Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I  
 1080 For anger: these are slanders: never yet  
 Was noble man but made ignoble talk.  
 He makes no friend who never made a foe.  
 But now it is my glory to have loved  
 One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,  
 1085 My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,  
 Not all unhappy, having loved God's best  
 And greatest, tho' my love had no return:  
 Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,  
 Thanks, but you work against your own desire;  
 1090 For if I could believe the things you say  
 I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,



Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man  
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.”

So when the ghostly man had come and gone  
 1095 She, with a face bright as for sin forgiven,  
 Besought Lavaine to write as she devised  
 A letter, word for word ; and when he ask'd,  
 “ Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord ?  
 Then will I bear it gladly ; ” she replied,  
 1100 “ For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,  
 But I myself must bear it.” Then he wrote  
 The letter she devised ; which being writ  
 And folded, “ O sweet father, tender and true,  
 Deny me not,” she said — “ ye never yet  
 1105 Denied my fancies — this, however strange,  
 My latest : lay the letter in my hand  
 A little ere I die, and close the hand  
 Upon it ; I shall guard it even in death.  
 And when the heat is gone from out my heart,  
 1110 Then take the little bed on which I died  
 For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's  
 For richness, and me also like the Queen  
 In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.  
 And let there be prepared a chariot-bier  
 1115 To take me to the river, and a barge  
 Be ready on the river, clothed in black.

1092. The ghostly man = the priest, to administer absolution.

1109. When the heat is gone from out my heart. This seems a thought of poetry, but Malory had already written the passage in prose : “ And when the letter was written word by word like as she devised, then she prayed her father that she might be watched until she were dead, — And while my body is hot, let this letter be put in my right hand, and my hand bound fast with the letter until that I be cold.”

I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.  
 There surely I shall speak for mine own self,  
 And none of you can speak for me so well.  
 1120 And therefore let our dumb old man alone  
 Go with me, he can steer and row, and he  
 Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."

She ceased : her father promised ; whereupon  
 She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death  
 1125 Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.  
 But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
 Her father laid the letter in her hand,  
 And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
 So that day there was dole in Astolat.

1130 But when the next sun brake from underground,  
 Then, these two brethren slowly with bent brows  
 Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier  
 Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone  
 Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,  
 1135 Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.  
 There sat the lifelong creature of the house,  
 Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,  
 Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.  
 So those two brethren from the chariot took  
 1140 And on the black decks laid her in her bed,  
 Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung  
 The silken case with braided blazonings,  
 And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her  
 "Sister, farewell for ever," and again  
 1145 "Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears.  
 Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,  
 Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood —  
 In her right hand the lily, in her left

The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —  
 1150 And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
 Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
 All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
 Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,  
 But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

1155 That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
 Audience of Guinevere, to give at last  
 The price of half a realm, his costly gift,  
 Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
 With deaths of others, and almost his own,  
 1160 The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw  
 One of her house, and sent him to the Queen  
 Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed  
 With such and so unmoved a majesty  
 She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,  
 1165 Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet  
 For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
 The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,  
 In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,  
 And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

1170 All in an oriel on the summer side,  
 Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,  
 They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, "Queen,  
 Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
 Take, what I had not won except for you,  
 1175 These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
 An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,  
 Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's  
 Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:  
 Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin

1169. Parted = departed.

1180 In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it  
 Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words,  
 Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,  
 I hear of rumors flying thro' your court.  
 Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
 1185 Should have in it an absoluter trust  
 To make up that defect: let rumors be:  
 When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust  
 That you trust me in your own nobleness,  
 I may not well believe that you believe."

1190 While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen  
 Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine  
 Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,  
 Till all the place whereon she stood was green;  
 Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand  
 1195 Received at once and laid aside the gems  
 There on a table near her, and replied:

“It may be, I am quicker of belief  
 Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.  
 Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.  
 1200 This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,  
 It can be broken easier. I for you  
 This many a year have done despite and wrong  
 To one whom ever in my heart of hearts  
 I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?  
 1205 Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth  
 Being your gift, had you not lost your own.  
 To loyal hearts the value of all gifts  
 Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!  
 For her! for your new fancy. Only this  
 1210 Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.  
 I doubt not that however changed, you keep

So much of what is graceful : and myself  
 Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy  
 In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule :  
 1215 So cannot speak my mind. An end to this !  
 A strange one ! yet I take it with Amen.  
 So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls ;  
 Deck her with these ; tell her, she shines me down :  
 An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's  
 1220 Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck  
 O as much fairer — as a faith once fair  
 Was richer than these diamonds — hers not mine —  
 Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,  
 Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —  
 1225 She shall not have them."

Saying which she seized,

And thro' the casement standing wide for heat,  
 Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the  
 stream,  
 Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,  
 Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.  
 1230 Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain  
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across  
 Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge  
 Whereon the lily maid of Astolat  
 1235 Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away  
 To weep and wail in secret ; and the barge,  
 On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.  
 There two stood arm'd, and kept the door ; to whom,  
 1240 All up the marble stair, tier over tier,  
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd

"What is it?" but that oarsman's haggard face,  
 As hard and still as is the face that men  
 Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks  
 1245 On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,  
 "He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she,  
 Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!  
 Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?  
 Or come to take the King to Fairyland?  
 1250 For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,  
 But that he passes into Fairyland."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King  
 Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless  
 man  
 From the half-face to the full eye, and rose  
 1255 And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.  
 So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale  
 And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;  
 And reverently they bore her into hall.  
 Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,  
 1260 And Lancelot later came and mused at her,  
 And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:  
 But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,  
 Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
 1265 I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,  
 Come, for you left me taking no farewell,  
 Hither, to take my last farewell of you.  
 I loved you, and my love had no return,

1250. Arthur, like Charlemagne and Boabdil, and Napoleon  
 in later times, was believed to be not dead, but to be abiding in  
 some enchanted place, whence he should come to free his country.  
 According to Malory his epitaph was,

"Hic jacet Arthurus rex quondam rexque futurus."



And therefore my true love has been my death.

1270 And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,  
 And to all other ladies, I make moan.  
 Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.  
 Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,  
 As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read ;

1275 And ever in the reading, lords and dames  
 Wept, looking often from his face who read  
 To hers which lay so silent, and at times,  
 So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
 Who had devised the letter, moved again.

1280 Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all :  
 " My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,  
 Know that for this most gentle maiden's death,  
 Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,  
 But loved me with a love beyond all love

1285 In woman, whomsoever I have known.  
 Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;  
 Not at my years, however it hold in youth.  
 I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave  
 No cause, not willingly, for such a love :

1290 To this I call my friends in testimony,  
 Her brethren, and her father, who himself  
 Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,  
 To break her passion, some discourtesy  
 Against my nature : what I could, I did.

1295 I left her and I bade her no farewell ;  
 Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,  
 I might have put my wits to some rough use,  
 And help'd her from herself."

Then said the Queen  
 (Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)  
 1300 "Ye might at least have done her so much grace,  
 Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her  
 death."  
 He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,  
 He adding :

"Queen, she would not be content  
 Save that I wedded her, which could not be.  
 1305 Then might she follow me thro' the world, she  
 ask'd ;  
 It could not be. I told her that her love  
 Was but the flash of youth, would darken down  
 To rise hereafter in a stiller flame  
 Toward one more worthy of her — then would I,  
 1310 More specially were he she wedded poor,  
 Estate them with large land and territory  
 In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,  
 To keep them in all joyance : more than this  
 I could not ; this she would not, and she died."

1315 He pausing, Arthur answer'd, " O my knight,  
 It will be to thy worship, as my knight,  
 And mine, as head of all our Table Round,  
 To see that she be buried worshipfully."

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm  
 1320 Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went  
 The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,

1319. That shrine, presumably Westminster, as Malory's narrative of the bringing of Elaine to the court reads: "And so the man steared the barget unto Westminster, and there he rowed a great while to and fro as any espied it."

And Lancelot sat beyond his wont, to see  
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,  
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,  
1325 And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.  
And when the knights had laid her comely head  
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,  
Then Arthur spake among them, "Let her tomb  
Be costly, and her image thereupon,  
1330 And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet  
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.  
And let the story of her dolorous voyage  
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb  
In letters gold and azure!" which was wrought  
1335 Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames  
And people, from the high door streaming, brake  
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,  
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,  
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, "Lancelot,  
1340 Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love."  
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,  
"That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, for-  
given."  
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,  
Approach'd him, and with full affection said,  
1345 "Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have  
Most joy and most affiance, for I know  
What thou hast been in battle by my side,  
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt  
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,  
1350 And let the younger and unskill'd go by  
To win his honor and to make his name,  
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man  
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,

Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,  
 1355 Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it  
       seems,  
 By God for thee alone, and from her face,  
 If one may judge the living by the dead,  
 Delicately pure and marvellously fair,  
 Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man,  
 1360 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons  
 Born to the glory of thy name and fame,  
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

Then answer'd Lancelot, "Fair she was, my  
       King,  
 Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.  
 1365 To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,  
 To doubt her pureness were to want a heart —  
 Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love  
 Could bind him, but free love will not be bound."

"Free love, so bound, were freest," said the  
       King.  
 1370 "Let love be free; free love is for the best:  
 And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,  
 What should be best, if not so pure a love  
 Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee  
 She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,  
 1375 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know."

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,  
 And at the inrunning of a little brook  
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd  
 The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes  
 1380 And saw the barge that brought her moving down,  
 Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said

Low in himself, " Ah simple heart and sweet,  
 Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love  
 Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?  
 1385 Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last —  
 Farewell, fair lily. ' Jealousy in love ?'  
 Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?  
 Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,  
 May not your crescent fear for name and fame,  
 1390 Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?  
 Why did the King dwell on my name to me?  
 Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,  
 Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake  
 Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one  
 1395 Who passes thro' the vision of the night —  
 She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns  
 Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn.  
 She kiss'd me saying, ' Thou art fair, my child,  
 As a king's son,' and often in her arms  
 1400 She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.  
 Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!  
 For what am I? what profits me my name  
 Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:  
 Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;  
 1405 Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?  
 To make men worse by making my sin known?  
 Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?  
 Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man  
 Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break  
 1410 These bonds that so defame me: not without  
 She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,  
 Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,  
 I pray him, send a sudden Angel down

1389. *Crescent* ; see l. 446.

1391. *My name*, meaning also *my fame*.

To seize me by the hair and bear me far,  
 1415 And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
 Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

So groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,  
 Not knowing he should die a holy man.

### THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,  
 First made and latest left of all the knights,  
 Told, when the man was no more than a voice  
 In the white winter of his age, to those  
 5 With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,  
 Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,  
 Heard in his tent the moanings of the King :

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
 10 I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,  
 But in His ways with men I find Him not.  
 I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.  
 O me! for why is all around us here  
 As if some lesser god had made the world,  
 15 But had not force to shape it as he would,  
 Till the High God behold it from beyond,

The *Passing of Arthur*, as we have already said in the Introductory Sketch, is identical with the greater portion of the "Morte d'Arthur" of 1842, and in its present form first appeared as one of the Idylls in the volume of 1869. The passage in Malory from which its most important part is taken may also be found in the Introductory Sketch, and is well worth reading in direct connection with the poem.



And enter it, and make it beautiful?  
 Or else as if the world were wholly fair,  
 But that these eyes of men are dense<sup>o</sup> and dim,  
 20 And have not power to see it as it is :  
 Perchance, because we see not to the close ; —  
 For I, being simple, thought to work His will,  
 And have but stricken with the sword in vain ;  
 And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend  
 25 Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm  
 Reels back into the beast, and is no more.  
 My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death :  
 Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die.”

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,  
 30 There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd  
 In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown  
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear  
 Went shrilling, “Hollow, hollow all delight!  
 Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.  
 35 Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.  
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,  
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.”  
 And fainter onward, like wild birds that change  
 Their season in the night and wail their way  
 40 From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream  
 Shri'll'd ; but in going mingled with dim cries  
 Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,  
 As of some lonely city sack'd by night,  
 When all is lost, and wife and child with wail  
 45 Pass to new lords! and Arthur woke and call'd,

28. **I pass but shall not die** ; the old belief expressed in other Idylls. See “Lancelot and Elaine,” ll. 1250, 1251, note.

31. **The ghost of Gawain** ; in Malory, too, the king received such a warning as Gawain here gives.

“ Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,  
Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries  
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild  
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me? ”

50 This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake :

“ O me, my King, let pass whatever will,  
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field ;  
But in their stead thy name and glory cling  
To all high places like a golden cloud

55 For ever : but as yet thou shalt not pass.

Light was Gawain in life, and light in death  
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man ;  
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —  
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,

60 And with him many of thy people, and knights  
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown  
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.  
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.  
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.”

65 Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :

“ Far other is this battle in the west  
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,  
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,  
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,

70 And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine  
To war against my people and my knights.  
The king who fights his people fights himself.  
And they my knights, who loved me once, the  
stroke

That strikes them dead is as my death to me.

56. **Light was Gawain in life** ; one side of his character was shown in “ Lancelot and Elaine.”

75 Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way  
 Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw  
 One lying in the dust at Almesbury,  
 Hath folded in the passes of the world."

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,  
 80 And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,  
 Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse —  
 A land of old upheaven from the abyss  
 By fire, to sink into the abyss again ;  
 Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,  
 85 And the long mountains ended in a coast  
 Of ever-shifting sand, and far away  
 The phantom circle of a moaning sea.  
 There the pursuer could pursue no more,  
 And he that fled no further fly the King ;  
 90 And there, that day when the great light of heaven  
 Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,  
 On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.  
 Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight  
 Like this last dim, weird battle of the west.  
 95 A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea :  
 Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew  
 Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold  
 With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell  
 Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought,  
 100 For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,  
 And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew ;  
 And some had visions out of golden youth,  
 And some beheld the faces of old ghosts  
 Look in upon the battle ; and in the mist

83. **To sink into the abyss again** ; a reference to the belief that Lyonesse, between Cornwall and the Scilly Islands, is now submerged.

105 Was many a noble deed, many a base,  
 And chance and craft and strength in single fights,  
 And ever and anon with host to host  
 Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail  
     hewn,  
 Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash  
 110 Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks  
 After the Christ, of those who falling down  
 Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;  
 And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,  
 Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,  
 115 Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs  
 In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
 Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail  
 Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death  
 120 Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,  
 Save for some whisper of the seething seas,  
 A dead hush fell ; but when the dolorous day  
 Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came  
 A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew  
 125 The mist aside, and with that wind the tide  
 Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field  
 Of battle : but no man was moving there ;  
 Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,  
 Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave  
 130 Brake in among dead faces, to and fro  
 Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down  
 Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,  
 And shiver'd brands that once had fought with  
     Rome,  
 And rolling far along the gloomy shores  
 135 The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
 And whiter than the mist that all day long  
 Had held the field of battle was the King :

“Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the  
 world  
 140 And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,  
 And beats upon the faces of the dead,  
 My dead, as tho’ they had not died for me? —  
 O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall’n  
 Confusion, till I know not what I am,  
 145 Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.  
 Behold, I seem but King among the dead.”

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: “My King,  
 King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,  
 There also will I worship thee as King.  
 150 Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live  
 Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought  
 The heathen back among us, yonder stands,  
 Modred, unharm’d, the traitor of thine house.”

Then spake the King: “My house had been my  
 doom,  
 155 But call not thou this traitor of my house  
 Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.  
 My house are rather they who sware my vows,  
 Yea, even while they brake them, own’d me King.  
 And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,  
 160 When all the purport of my throne hath fail’d,  
 That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.  
 King am I, whatsoever be their cry;  
 And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see

148. So, in the best familiar sense of *provided that, if*.

Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King  
 165 Made at the man : then Modred smote his liege  
 Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword  
 Had beaten thin ; while Arthur at one blow,  
 Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,  
 Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

170 So all day long the noise of battle roll'd  
 Among the mountains by the winter sea ;  
 Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,  
 Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,  
 King Arthur. Then, because his wound was  
 deep,  
 175 The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
 And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
 A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
 That stood on a dark strait of barren land :  
 On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
 180 Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
 "The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
 The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
 Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep  
 185 They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we  
 Shall never more, at any future time,  
 Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
 Walking about the gardens and the halls  
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
 190 I perish by this people which I made, —  
 Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again

168. Excalibur ; see "Gareth and Lynette," l. 66, note.

170. With this line, following the introduction called "The Epic," Tennyson's early poem the "Morte d'Arthur" began.



To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,  
 I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm  
 That without help I cannot last till morn.  
 195 Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
 Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how  
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 200 Holding the sword — and how I row'd across  
 And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;  
 And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
 In aftertime, this also shall be known :  
 But now delay not : take Excalibur,  
 205 And fling him far into the middle mere :  
 Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 " It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
 Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm —  
 210 A little thing may harm a wounded man :  
 Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
 Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,  
 And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
 215 Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
 Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
 Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping  
 down

195. It is from this point that the narrative of Malory is most closely followed.

197. An arm *Rose up* ; as related in Malory, i., xxiii.

205. *Him*, as if Arthur thought of the sword as a personal comrade.

By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

220 There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
225 Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd  
230 Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd  
There in the many-knotted waterflags,  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
235 " Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?  
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? "

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
" I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag. "

240 To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :  
" Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd  
Thy fæalty, nor like a noble knight :  
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,  
245 Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.

241. **Thy name** ; this may be taken for *fame* or *reputation*, as before in the Idylls, or possibly as referring to the *-vere* of his name, meaning *true*.

This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
 Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
 As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
 I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

250 Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
 Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
 Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;  
 But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
 How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
 255 His palms together, and he cried aloud:

“And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
 Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
 Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
 Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
 260 What good should follow this, if this were done?  
 What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,  
 Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
 Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
 An act unprofitable, against himself?  
 265 The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
 What record, or what relic of my lord  
 Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
 And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,  
 Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
 270 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
 Saying, ‘King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur,  
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.  
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills.’  
 275 So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
 To all the people, winning reverence.  
 But now much honor and much fame were lost.”

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
 And hid Excalibur the second time,  
 280 And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :  
 "What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 "I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
 285 And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :  
 "Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!  
 Authority forgets a dying king,  
 290 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye  
 That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,  
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
 In whom should meet the offices of all,  
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;  
 295 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :  
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
 300 I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
 Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great  
 brand  
 305 Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,

And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,

Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.

310 So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:

But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.

215 And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:  
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:

320 "Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,  
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.

325 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;  
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
That caught him by the hilt and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

306. Whirl'd in an arch; *in* and *an* must almost be contracted in reading into one syllable. The line, like many others in the Idylls, departs from structural exactness, in order to make an effect in sound corresponding with the sense.

307. The northern morn = the aurora borealis.

308. Where the moving isles of winter, etc. = where the floes of ice crash together by night in the Northern Sea.

830 And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :  
 “ My end draws nigh ; ’t is time that I were gone.  
 Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
 And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear  
 My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.”

335 So saying, from the pavement he half rose,  
 Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
 And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
 As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
 Remorsefully regarded thro’ his tears,  
 340 And would have spoken, but he found not words ;  
 Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,  
 O’er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
 And rising bore him thro’ the place of tombs.

But, as he walk’d, King Arthur panted hard,  
 345 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
 When all the house is mute. So sigh’d the King,  
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, “ Quick,  
 quick !  
 I fear it is too late, and I shall die.”  
 But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
 350 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk’d,  
 Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
 He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
 Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
 Dry clash’d his harness in the icy caves  
 355 And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
 The bare black cliff clang’d round him, as he based  
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —  
 And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,  
 360 And the long glories of the winter moon.



Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
 Beneath them ; and descending they were ware  
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
 365 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these  
 Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them  
 rose

A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
 And, as it were one voice, an agony  
 Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
 370 All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
 Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, " Place me in the barge."  
 So to the barge they came. There those three  
 Queens

Put forth their hands, and took the King, and  
 wept.

375 But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
 And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
 And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his  
 hands,

And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,  
 And dropping bitter tears against a brow  
 380 Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white  
 And colorless, and like the wither'd moon  
 Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;  
 And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops  
 Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls —

385 That made his forehead like a rising sun  
 High from the dais-throne — were parch'd with  
 dust ;

Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
 Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.

So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;  
 390 Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
 From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
 Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
 Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 395 " Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?  
 Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
 For now I see the true old times are dead,  
 When every morning brought a noble chance,  
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
 400 Such times have been not since the light that led  
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
 But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
 Which was an image of the mighty world  
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
 405 And the days darken round me, and the years,  
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :  
 " The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
 And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
 410 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
 Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?  
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
 May He within himself make pure ! but thou,  
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
 415 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by  
 prayer  
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy  
 voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.

For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 420 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them  
 friend ?

For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
 But now farewell. I am going a long way  
 425 With these thou seest — if indeed I go  
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) —  
 To the island-valley of Avilion ;  
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies  
 430 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
 And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
 435 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
 With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
 Revolving many memories, till the hull  
 Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
 440 And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,  
 The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn  
 Amazed him, and he groan'd, " The King is gone."  
 And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,  
 445 " From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

434. Like some full-breasted swan ; referring to the familiar, if unscientific, belief that swans sing before they die.

440. With this line the " Morte d' Arthur " ended.

445. See " The Coming of Arthur," l. 410.

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb  
 The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;  
 Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,  
 " He passes to be King among the dead,  
 450 And after healing of his grievous wound  
 He comes again ; but — if he come no more —  
 O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,  
 Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we  
       gazed  
 On that high day, when, clothed with living light,  
 455 They stood before his throne in silence, friends  
 Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ? "

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but  
 faint,  
 As from beyond the limit of the world,  
 Like the last echo born of a great cry,  
 460 Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice  
 Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb  
 Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,  
 Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
 465 Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
 Down that long water opening on the deep  
 Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
 From less to less and vanish into light.  
 And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

453. **The three whereat we gazed** : see " The Coming of Arthur," ll. 275-278.



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